

The Revelation of the Trinity

Karl Rahner's Position
and an Evangelical Alternative

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Charles M. Jowers & Jane T. Jowers, who have continually supported, encouraged, and loved me; and to my beautiful, brilliant, and virtuous wife, Judy, without whose help and encouragement this thesis would never have been written.

Declaration of Authorship

- (a) This thesis has been composed by me, the candidate, Dennis William Jowers.
- (b) This is my own work.
- (c) This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Signature

Date 06/July/04

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	xi
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Preface	1
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Part One: Karl Rahner's Position

Chapter 1: Rahner on the Revelation of the Trinity: Introduction and Preliminary Critique	6
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I. Introduction	6
II. Rahner's Philosophical Presuppositions	6
1. Introduction	6
2. The foundations and nature of knowledge	7
3. The existence of God	10
4. An orientation to a possible revelation	12
5. Conclusion	16
III. The relation of Rahner's philosophy to his theology	18
1. Introduction	18
2. The range of interpretations	18
a. The semi-foundationalist interpretation	18
b. The non-foundationalist interpretation	18
3. Evaluation	19
a. Formal vs. material distinctions	20
i. Introduction	20
ii. The modally supernatural	20
iii. Absence of material distinctions	20
iv. Formally philosophical premises	21
v. Conclusion	21
b. Discontinuities in Rahner's thought	23
i. Introduction	23
ii. The supernatural existential	23
α. Introduction	23
β. Rahner's motive	24
γ. Rahner's proposal	24
δ. Conclusion	26
iii. Transcendental revelation	27
iv. Formally philosophical presuppositions	28
v. Conclusion	28
c. Gnoseological concupiscence	29
i. What is gnoseological concupiscence?	29
ii. Contradictions between secular knowledge and faith	30
iii. Inability to survey the range of philosophies and theologies	31

4. Conclusion	38
IV. Modification of Rahner's views	39
1. Introduction	39
2. God as the transcendental horizon of human experience	39
3. Divine intervention in the categorical order	41
4. Conclusion	42
V. Revelation as such	43
VI. The Revelation of the Trinity	50
1. Introduction	50
2. Rahner's <i>Grundaxiom</i>	51
a. Four misconstruals	51
i. Trivially obvious identity	51
ii. Absolute identity	52
iii. Copy theory	52
iv. Merely <i>de facto</i> identity	53
b. Rahner's actual meaning	53
c. Rahner's arguments for the <i>Grundaxiom</i>	53
i. The argument from divine self-communication	54
ii. The argument from the non-occurrence of verbal revelation	57
d. Conclusion	58
3. The Trinitarian structure of the revelatory event	59
a. Rahner's objective	59
b. Dual modalities of divine self-communication	59
c. Rahner's dyads	61
i. Introduction	61
ii. Origin-future	61
iii. History-transcendence	62
iv. Offer-acceptance	63
v. Knowledge-love	64
α. The problematic	64
β. Truth	65
γ. Love	68
δ. Criticism	69
vi. Evaluation	70
d. Results	71
VII. Conclusion.	72
Chapter 2: Counterarguments on Rahner's Behalf	73
I. Introduction	73
II. Divine Transcendence and Self-Communication	75
1. Introduction	75
2. Rahner's acknowledgement of divine transcendence	75
a. Simplicity	75
b. Immutability	75

c. Atemporality	76
d. Impassibility	76
e. No real relations to the world	76
f. Distinctness from the world	76
3. Absolute self-communication.....	77
a. "God becomes world."	77
b. Real relations to the world.....	78
c. Temporality.....	78
d. Passibility.....	78
e. Mutability.....	79
4. Conclusion	79
III. Bert van der Heijden.....	80
1. Introduction	80
2. Heijden's argument.....	80
a. <i>Selbstmitteilung</i> vs. <i>Seinsmitteilung</i>	80
b. <i>Der Kampf gegen Tritheismus</i>	81
c. <i>Der Kampf gegen Monophysitismus</i>	82
d. <i>Sein = Beisichsein</i>	83
e. Rahner's immutability formula.....	84
3. Response	85
a. <i>Selbstmitteilung</i> vs. <i>Seinsmitteilung</i>	86
b. Persons and essence.....	87
c. Autonomy of Christ's humanity	88
d. Unity and distinction in God	89
4. Conclusion	90
IV. Conciliar Authority and the Consistency of Rahner's Views	91
1. Introduction	91
2. Sanctifying grace	92
a. Introduction.....	92
b. Rahner's arguments	93
i. Uncreated grace as presupposition of the beatific vision	93
α. Introduction	93
β. Being and knowing.....	94
γ. God as impressed species.....	96
δ. Conclusion	97
ii. The priority of uncreated over created grace.....	98
α. Introduction	98
β. The "scholastic" view of uncreated grace	98
γ. Rahner's alternative	100
δ. Conclusion	101
c. Response	101
i. Introduction	101
ii. Uncreated grace as ontological presupposition of the beatific vision ..	102
α. Introduction.....	102
β. Being and knowing.....	103
γ. God as impressed species.....	106

δ. Conclusion	108
iii. The priority of uncreated over created grace	108
α. The scholastic views	108
β. Rahner's position.....	110
γ. Criticisms	112
d. Conclusion	114
3. The Incarnation of the Logos.....	115
a. Introduction.....	115
b. Rahner's theory of the "uniting unity" in the Incarnation	115
c. Advantages of Rahner's theory.....	117
i. Reconciling Christ's divinity with his full humanity	118
ii. Correlating intra-divine processions and divine acts <i>ad extra</i>	118
iii. Adjusting to a contemporary worldview	119
d. Difficulties for Rahner's theory.....	120
i. Unification through differentiation.....	120
ii. The singularity of the hypostatic union	123
α. The extent of the problem	123
β. The absoluteness of the divine nature	124
γ. The oscillating hypostasis	124
e. Assessment.....	127
4. Christ's absolute saviorhood	128
a. Introduction.....	128
b. Rahner's argument.....	128
c. Criticisms	130
i. Introduction	130
ii. The mysteries of Jesus' life.....	130
α. The mysteries' significance for Rahner's Christology.....	130
β. Implications for the concept of absolute savior.....	132
iii. The <i>Heilsbedeutsamkeit</i> of all categorical experience	132
iv. Assessment	133
d. Excursus on the views of Bruce Marshall	133
i. Introduction	133
ii. Difficulties for Marshall's position	134
α. Introduction	134
β. Textual evidence against Marshall's thesis	135
γ. Evidence for Marshall's thesis?	136
δ. Evaluation.....	137
iii. Conclusion.....	137
e. Summary	138
5. Results	138
V. Conclusion	138
Chapter 3: Further Criticisms.....	141
I. Introduction.....	141
II. The impossibility of a non-verbal, non-conceptual revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity other than the beatific vision.	142

1. Introduction	142
2. Rahner's case against the minor premise of syllogism 1.....	144
a. What does Rahner actually believe?.....	144
b. Difficulties for Rahner's position.....	146
c. Rahner's response.....	150
i. <i>Mystici Corporis</i>	150
ii. Three alleged counterexamples.....	152
α. Introduction.....	152
β. The Incarnation.....	154
γ. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit.....	158
δ. The beatific vision.....	160
ε. Conclusion.....	161
3. Rahner's case against the major premise of syllogism 4.....	162
4. Conclusion.....	162
III. Christ's Anointing with the Holy Spirit as a Test Case for the <i>Grundaxiom</i>	163
1. Introduction.....	163
2. Methodological considerations.....	163
a. Does Rahner consider Scripture a legitimate measure of the truth or falsehood of theological statements?.....	164
b. Is Scripture an appropriate norm for the <i>Grundaxiom</i> of Rahner's theology of the Trinity?.....	166
i. The relevance of the Bible to the theology of the Trinity.....	167
ii. The hermeneutical character of the <i>Grundaxiom</i>	168
c. Is Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit an appropriate matrix within which to test Rahner's <i>Grundaxiom</i> ?.....	169
3. Reconciling the anointing accounts, when interpreted in accordance with the <i>Grundaxiom</i> , with Rahner's filioquism.....	170
a. Involvement of the Spirit in the begetting of the Son.....	171
i. Patristic precedents.....	172
ii. Difficulties.....	173
b. The anointing accounts manifest a prior occurrence in which the missions and the processions correspond.....	174
i. Mühlen's dogmatic understanding of the anointing.....	174
ii. Grace and the person.....	175
iii. Patristic precedents.....	177
iv. Difficulties.....	178
c. The Spirit as intra-Trinitarian gift of the Father to the Son.....	179
i. The identity of active spiration and active filiation.....	180
ii. The Holy Spirit as <i>medius nexus</i> of the Father and the Son.....	180
iii. Difficulties.....	181
iv. Responses.....	182
v. The order of circumincession and human knowledge of the Trinity....	184
d. Conclusion.....	185
IV. Outlook.....	186

Part Two: An Evangelical Alternative

Chapter 4: Scriptural Foundations for the Doctrine of the Trinity.....	188
I. Introduction	188
II. The Deity of Jesus Christ.....	189
1. Introduction	189
2. The significance of Philippians 2:6-7	190
3. The centrality of μορφή.....	190
4. Μορφή = εἰκὼν.....	191
a. Nuance or alternative?	191
b. Arguments in favor.....	192
i. The argument from the LXX translation of מָלַךְ by μορφή.....	193
ii. The argument from the Peshitta's translation of מַלְכָּא by מוֹרְפָּא ..	194
iii. The argument from Paul's juxtaposition of cognates of μορφή with εἰκὼν.....	195
c. Difficulties.....	196
5. Μορφή = <i>Erscheinungsform</i>	196
a. Arguments in favor.....	197
i. The argument from NT use of μορφή and its derivatives in the sense of "visible appearance."	198
ii. The argument from the LXX usage of μορφή.....	199
b. Difficulties.....	199
6. Μορφή = οὐσία.....	200
7. Conclusion	202
III. The Personality of the Holy Spirit.....	203
IV. In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes.....	205
1. Premises of Our Argument.....	205
a. Divine simplicity.....	205
b. The transitivity of identity	206
c. The eternal generation of the Son	207
d. The eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.....	208
2. The specifically Trinitarian realities of Scripture.....	209
3. The method of the proof	210
4. The proof itself	210
5. Two difficulties.....	213
a. Persons, perfections, and simplicity	213
b. Presuppositions about identity	214
6. Conclusion	216
V. Implications	217
Epilogue	218
Bibliography.....	220

Works by Karl Rahner.....	220
Works by Other Authors	225

Abbreviations

Bib = *Biblica*

Bsac = *Bibliotheca Sacra*

BSGRT = Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana

BSRel = Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose

CBQ = *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CCL = Corpus Christianorum Series Latinorum (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954-)

CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1866-)

CUFr = Collection des Universités de France

DB²⁷ = *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionem, et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Heinrich Denzinger, ed.; Clement Bannwart and Johannes B. Umberg, rev.; Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1951²⁷)

DH = *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, (Heinrich Denzinger, ed.; Peter Hünermann, rev.; Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1991³⁷)

EtB = *Études Bibliques*

ETL = *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis*

Foundations = *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (William V. Dych, trans.; New York: Crossroad, 1978)

GNO = *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*

Greg = *Gregorianum*

Grundkurs = *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* in *SmtWk* xxvi, 3-442

GTA = Göttinger theologische Arbeiten

GW = *Geist in Welt: Zur Metaphysik der endlichen Erkenntnis bei Thomas von Aquin* in *SmtWk* ii, 5-300

IIBT – *Horizons of Biblical Theology*

HeyJ = *Heythrop Journal*

Hörer = *Hörer des Wortes: Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie* in *SmtWk* iv, 2-278

HThKNT = Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

HTR = *Harvard Theological Review*

HW = *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* (Joseph Donceel, tr.; Andrew Tallon, ed.; New York: Continuum, 1994)

JR = *Journal of Religion*

JSNT = *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*

JSNT.S = *JSNT Supplement Series*

JThS = *Journal of Theological Studies*

*KThW*¹ = Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1961)

*KThW*¹⁰ = Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1976¹⁰)

*LThK*² = *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche* (Karl Rahner, ed.; Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1957-65²)

MBTh = Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie

MS = *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik* 1-5 (Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer, ed.; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965-81)

MThS.S = Münchener theologische Studien 2. Systematische Abteilung

MThZ = *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift*

NIGNT = New International Greek Testament Commentary

NRT = *Nouvelle revue théologique*

NS = new series

NTS = *New Testament Studies*

NZStH = *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*

PG = *Patrologia graeca* (J.-P. Migne, ed.; Paris: Typis J.-P. Migne, 1844-)

PL = *Patrologia latina* (J.-P. Migne, ed.; Paris: Typis J.-P. Migne, 1857-)

PUG = Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana

QD = *Quaestiones Disputatae*

RB = *Revue biblique*

RSR = *Recherches de science religieuse*

RT = *Revue Thomiste*

SC = Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1941-)

SHAW.PH = Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse

SJTh.OP = *Scottish Journal of Theology* Occasional Papers

SM = *Sacramentum Mundi*

SM(E) = *Sacramentum Mundi* (English translation)

SmtWk = *Sämtliche Werke* 2-4, 8, 15, 17, 26, and 27 (Karl Lehmann, Johannes B. Metz, Karl-Heinz Neufeld, Albert Raffelt, and Herbert Vorgrimler, ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1995-)

SNTSM = Society for the Study of the New Testament Monograph Series

StAns = *Studia Anselmiana*

STh = *Summa Theologiae*

StZ = *Stimmen der Zeit*

SW = *Spirit in the World* (Johannes B. Metz, ed.; William V. Dych, tr.; New York: Herder, 1968)

SzTh = *Schriften zur Theologie* 1-16 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954-84)

TDNT = *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1-10 (Gerhard Kittel, ed.; Geoffrey Bromiley, tr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-76)

TDOT = *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 1- (G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren, ed.; Heinz-Josef Fabry, co-ed. of vv. 7- ; John T. Willis, tr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974-)

TI = *Theological Investigations* 1-23 (Cornelius Ernst et al, tr.; London: DLT, 1961-92)

TQ = *Theologische Quartalschrift*

TS = *Theological Studies*

TU = *Texte und Untersuchungen*

TW = *Theologie und Wirklichkeit*

TZ = *Theologische Zeitschrift*

WBC = *Word Biblical Commentary*

ZKT = *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*

ZNW = *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

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Abstract

The widely accepted *Grundaxiom* of Karl Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity, "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa," functions in contemporary theology as a means of reconciling the seemingly contradictory claims: (a) that God has revealed the doctrine of the Trinity to the church; and (b) that he has not disclosed this doctrine verbally in Scripture. Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, that is to say, serves to legitimate theological reflection on the Trinity that does not presuppose a pre-Enlightenment understanding of Scriptural revelation.

In our dissertation, however, we argue: (a) that Rahner's *Grundaxiom* does not cohere with certain elements of Rahner's own theology; (b) that the *Grundaxiom* entails conclusions inconsistent with what Rahner regards as Trinitarian orthodoxy; and (c) that a pre-Enlightenment understanding of Scripture, by contrast, constitutes a reasonable foundation for Rahner's ideal of Trinitarian orthodoxy. We conclude, therefore (d) that, barring the possibility of some third foundation for the theology of the Trinity, Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity itself presupposes a pre-Enlightenment conception of Scriptural revelation.

Preface

In “The Revelation of the Trinity: Karl Rahner’s Position and an Evangelical Alternative,” we hope to achieve two fundamental objectives: first, to discredit Karl Rahner’s account of how God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity; and, second, to valorize an alternative account of this process. We hope, that is to say, in Part 1 of this work, to criticize Rahner’s belief that because God communicates his very self (*semetipsum*) to human beings in the economy of salvation, human beings can reasonably assume that the triune form in which God appears in this economy belongs to him necessarily and eternally. In Part 2 of this work, we hope to construct an alternative account of how God endows human beings with knowledge of the immanent Trinity by way of establishing that Scripture implicitly contains the doctrine of the Trinity.

In Part 1, specifically, we intend to level four, principal criticisms of Rahner’s views on these subjects. First, we shall argue, if God is simple, as Rahner admits, and incapable of communicating himself without undergoing some metamorphosis, as Rahner insists, then the economic Trinity cannot correspond precisely to the immanent Trinity in any respect. Since every aspect of a simple God is absolutely, albeit not necessarily relatively, identical with every other, that is to say, a simple being cannot change in any respect without also changing in every respect. If, then, the immanent Trinity, i.e. God in himself prescinding from any self-communication, must mutate in some way in order to become the economic Trinity, i.e. God communicating himself to his creation, then the tripersonal structure of the economic Trinity can coincide with that of the immanent Trinity in no respect whatsoever. In such a case, it seems, one could not justifiably attribute the triune form God exhibits in the economy of salvation to God as he would have existed irrespective of any self-communication.

We shall argue, second, that even if a simple God could somehow exempt his inner, relational structure from the comprehensive metamorphosis requisite to self-communication as Rahner understands it, human beings could never know which aspects of God communicated actually do correspond to the hypothetical uncommunicated God and which do not unless God either endowed them with the beatific vision or simply told them through a verbal, or at least a conceptual, revelation. Even if the first criticism were invalid, then, a communication of the

doctrine of the immanent Trinity to human beings would still require a verbal/conceptual revelation, the possibility of which Rahner refuses to countenance. To the extent, then, that he constructs his account of the Trinity's self-revelation precisely in order to prove that human beings can attain to warranted, true belief in the doctrine of the Trinity without a verbal/conceptual revelation, Rahner's account fails to achieve its purpose.

We shall argue, third, that if, as Rahner admits: a) the Trinitarian persons possess as peculiar to themselves only their relations of opposition to each other; and b) "in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence;"¹ then God can influence creation only through the one, undifferentiated divine omnipotence and not through any powers peculiar to the persons. In this case, it seems, one could not infer God's intrinsic triunity from the triune character of the causality he exercises in divine self-communication, because every divine influence would proceed from a strictly unitary principle. Rahner's own presuppositions, therefore, imply that a non-verbal, non-conceptual revelation other than the beatific vision cannot convey to human beings the doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

Fourth and finally, we shall argue, the Biblical accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16, 17; Mark 1:10, 11; Luke 3:22; and John 1:32), when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner's theology of the Trinity, "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa," entail conclusions incompatible with Rahner's orthodox, Latin Trinitarianism. One can, we shall argue, so expand one's concept of what qualifies as correspondence between economy and theology as to allow for a projection of the pattern of relations displayed in the anointing into the immanent Trinity that would not undermine Latin Trinitarianism. Yet one can do so, we hope to prove, only at the expense of depriving the *Grundaxiom* of its power to warrant inferences from the triune structure(s) manifested in the economy of salvation to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

In Part 1, therefore, we hope to counter Rahner's understanding of how God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity with four, principal objections that, in our view at least, suffice to compromise its credibility significantly. In Part 2, we intend to construct an alternative and, hopefully, more satisfactory account of the means whereby God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity. We intend, specifically, to show

¹ *The Trinity* (Joseph Donceel, tr.; New York: Herder, 1970), 71; "Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte" in *MS ii*, 317-401 at 363.

that Scripture taken as a whole implicitly contains the full, orthodox, Latin doctrine of the Trinity so that, given a conservative evangelical understanding of Scripture and its authority, one is warranted in accepting this doctrine as divinely revealed.

We hope to derive the Latin doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture by the following procedure. Assuming that Christ's distinctness from the Father and the Spirit and the Spirit's deity are sufficiently manifest in Scripture as to require no special proof, we intend: a) to vindicate the deity of Christ principally by demonstrating the equivalence of *μορφή*, as Paul employs the term in Phil 2:6-7, with *οὐσία*; and b) to demonstrate from Scripture that the Holy Spirit constitutes a divine person distinct from the Father and the Son. We hope, then, to derive from Scripture the doctrines of c) divine simplicity; and d) the transitivity of identity. After e) establishing the existence of certain realities that pertain formally to the divine persons rather than the divine essence, without, of course, giving rise to a real distinction between the persons and the essence, we hope f) by a process of elimination to show that the persons' relations of opposition alone account for their distinctness from each other. We intend, next, g) to draw the consequence that, if the divine persons possess as peculiar to themselves only their relations to each other, then they possess no capacity for action insofar as they are distinct and, therefore, h) cannot reveal their mutual distinctness to human beings by exerting distinct influences on creation from which this distinctness might be inferred. In this case, we shall observe in conclusion, the divine persons can reveal their distinctness to human beings who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision only through a verbal, or at least a conceptual, revelation.

In the present work, then, we intend to mount a thoroughgoing critique of Karl Rahner's understanding of the means whereby God reveals the intra-Trinitarian distinctions to human beings and especially of his view that verbal/conceptual revelation need not play a role in any actual, divine disclosure of the divine persons' multiplicity to human beings who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision. After discrediting, to the best of our ability, Rahner's views on these subjects, then, we hope to show how, by an alternative method, one can reach, without unduly straining one's credulity, an orthodox, Latin doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of a Protestant, inerrantist, and so, to a certain extent at least, "evangelical" view of Scripture. We hope to prove by these means, specifically, that human beings who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision cannot attain to warranted, true belief in the orthodox, Latin

doctrine of the Trinity by means of a revelation through acts and/or athematic experience, as Rahner proposes; but that they can attain to warranted, true belief in this same doctrine by means of a revelation in concepts and/or words. We hope to prove, that is to say, that the orthodox, Latin doctrine of the Trinity presupposes the belief that God reveals certain truths to human beings in concepts and/or words.

Part One

Karl Rahner's Position

Chapter 1: Rahner on the Revelation of the Trinity: Introduction and Preliminary Critique

I. Introduction

In the present chapter, we intend, first, to outline Rahner's philosophical presuppositions; second, to discuss the relation of Rahner's philosophy to his theology; third, to outline certain discontinuities between Rahner's early, philosophical thought and his later theology; fourth, briefly to introduce his mature views on revelation in general; fifth, to explain and in some measure evaluate the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner's theology of the Trinity, viz. "the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa;" and, sixth, critically to explore Rahner's understanding of the process whereby God supplies human beings with reasonable grounds for believing the doctrine of the Trinity. While executing the first four of these tasks, which we undertake solely for propaedeutic purposes, we shall limit ourselves, on the whole, to presenting and clarifying Rahner's perspective. In the last two sections, which pertain more immediately to the subject of this work, by contrast, we intend to interact more critically with Rahner's proposals without, however, presenting the pith of our critique of Rahner's understanding of God's revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity. This task, rather, must await the second and third chapters of this work to which the present chapter constitutes an extended introduction.

II. Rahner's Philosophical Presuppositions

1. Introduction. "In the deepest and truest sense," writes Karl Rahner:

[a] philosophy is not Christian, because it allows theology to serve as a negative norm for protection against ideas that might come into conflict with the convictions of Christian faith; nor because it allows itself to be stimulated by theology to new questions, which otherwise would have remained outside its area of vision; but because, in accordance with its own law and from questions immanent

to itself..., it understands the human being in such a way that it places him in the position of one poised for the appearance of a possibly occurring revelation; because it "sublates" itself (in the Hegelian sense) into theology.²

These words express the young Rahner's profound dissatisfaction with what many in the 1930's and 40's regarded as "Christian" philosophy as well as his aspirations for creating a Christian philosophy according to his own understanding of the term. Rahner considers a philosophy authentically Christian only if it "precisely as an authentic, as a 'pure' philosophy...refers beyond itself and invites us to assume the attitude of listening to an eventual revelation":³ only if, that is to say, it constitutes "a *praeparatio Evangelii*...[that] by itself alone...refers us beyond ourselves into history and places us before the question of an historical encounter with God."⁴

Rahner's efforts to realize this ideal of Christian philosophy concretize themselves, principally, in two works: *Geist in Welt* (1939) and *Hörer des Wortes* (1941), which constitute, respectively, a) an extraordinarily sophisticated, Heideggerian "retrieval" of what Rahner considers the central insights of Aquinas' *STh* Ia. 84, 7; and b) a series of lectures in which Rahner, in the process of elucidating the relationship between philosophy and theology, presents a more or less fully developed philosophy of religion. In the following, drawing principally upon these two works, we shall attempt to convey some sense of Rahner's designedly Christian philosophy and, particularly, his efforts 1) to clarify the nature and foundations of human knowledge; 2) to demonstrate the existence of God; and 3) to show that human beings possess an intrinsic orientation to a supernatural revelation without, however, compromising this revelation's gratuity.

2. *The foundations and nature of knowledge.* "The starting point of metaphysics," writes Rahner, "is the question: what is the being of beings?"⁵ This question alone suffices to justify the claim that the human person possesses knowledge of "the being of all beings,"⁶ Rahner believes, because the very ability to ask the question implies some knowledge of being as such on the part of the inquirer. In Rahner's words:

² "Religionsphilosophie und Theologie," *Salzburger Hochschulwochen* 1937 in *SmtWk* iv, 285-93 at 286.

³ *HW*, 16; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17; *ebd.*, 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25; *ebd.*, 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28; *ebd.*, 60.

When we inquire about the being of all beings, we admit that we have a provisional knowing about being in general. It is impossible to inquire about something that is in every respect and absolutely unknown. Thus some kind of knowing is asserted and expressed when we inquire about the meaning of being.”⁷

The human person’s very possession of such knowledge regardless of its content, moreover, implies, in Rahner’s view, the knowability of every being. Insofar as the inquiry about the being of all beings implies some knowledge in the inquirer of being as such, Rahner contends, “the first metaphysical question, the most universal question about being, is already the affirmation of the fundamental intelligibility of all beings.”⁸

This, in turn, implies, according to Rahner, perhaps the most fundamental conclusion of his metaphysics of knowledge: “being as such, to the extent that it is being, is knowing.”⁹ This follows from the universal intelligibility of beings, Rahner claims, because:

Otherwise this relation of every being by itself to some knowledge might at most be a factual one, and not a feature of every being, belonging to the very nature of its being. An essential relation of correlativity between two states of affairs must, in final analysis, be founded in an original unity of both of them.¹⁰

If the intelligibility of being really implies the identity of being and knowledge, Rahner recognizes, knowledge cannot consist in any correspondence involving a gap between the subjects and objects of thought. Instead, according to Rahner, knowledge can occur only where “the knower in the true sense and the known in the true sense are one and identical in being.”¹¹

This union between knower and known, the human capacity for which Rahner ascribes to the faculty of sensibility, dictates a somewhat unconventional approach to grounding the validity of human knowledge. In Rahner’s words:

⁷ Ibid.; ebd..

⁸ Ibid., 29; ebd., 60, 62. The intervening page is taken from the second edition of *Hörer des Wortes*, edited by Johannes Baptist Metz, which appears alongside the first edition in *SmtWk* iv.

⁹ Ibid.; ebd., 62.

¹⁰ Ibid.; ebd..

¹¹ “Thomas Aquinas on Truth,” *TI* xiii, 13-31 at 29; “Die Wahrheit bei Thomas von Aquin,” *SmtWk* ii, 303-16 at 315.

The problem does not lie in bridging the gap between knowing and object by a "bridge" of some kind: such a "gap" is merely a pseudo-problem. Rather the problem is how the known, which is identical with the knower, can stand over against the knower as other....It is not a question of "bridging" a gap, but of understanding how the gap is possible at all.¹²

Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge, therefore, revolves not, as in much earlier philosophy, around some device to unify the knower and the known; it revolves rather around the *Vorgriff*, a non-objective "pre-grasp" of *esse commune* that, in Rahner's view, makes possible a distinction in human consciousness between the knower and its object.

Rahner takes it as a self-evident datum of consciousness that human beings do, in fact, distinguish themselves from the objects of their knowledge. In order to determine "the *a priori* transcendental condition of the possibility"¹³ of this distinction, Rahner examines the structure of actual knowing.

From this phenomenological analysis, he concludes that "it is precisely because, through our concepts, we as knowing subjects know something of something, because we can refer a universal concept to a *this* to which it applies, that we oppose this *this* to ourselves"¹⁴ thus attaining consciousness of "our knowing self-subsistence,"¹⁵ i.e., consciousness of subsisting separately from known objects. It follows from this, according to Rahner, that "inquiring about the ultimate ground of...this self-subsistence is identically asking the following question: what makes it...possible to subsume the single sense object under a concept, to grasp the universal in the singular?"¹⁶

Rahner proceeds to inspect precisely what it means to "subsume the single sense object under a concept" and "to grasp the universal in the singular," in order further to refine his question. In order to view an individual thing, Rahner concludes, as an example of a particular kind of thing not necessarily limited to one instance, one must discern "the whatness (the *forma* or *quidditas* in Scholastic terminology)...as a determination which, in principle, applies to more than this individual object..."¹⁷ On this basis, Rahner formulates again a more specific question. "What is the

¹² *SW*, 75; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 66-7.

¹³ *HW*, 44; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-6; *ebd.*, 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46; *ebd.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 90.

transcendental condition that enables the knowing subject to discover that the quiddity is unlimited, although it is experienced as the quiddity of one single individual?"¹⁸

One can account for this human ability to recognize the universality hidden, as it were, under the guise of an individual thing, Rahner concludes, only by positing the existence of "an *a priori* power given with human nature"¹⁹ suited to this purpose. This power Rahner designates "the *Vorgriff*,"²⁰ i.e., "the dynamic movement of the spirit toward the absolute range of all possible objects."²¹ In this conscious "pre-grasp" or "pre-apprehension," every human knower, according to Rahner, apprehends individual sense objects against the background of all things knowable so that the particular thing "is also always known as not filling this domain completely, hence as limited. And insofar as it is *thus* known *as* limited, the quidditative determination [i.e., the whatness of the thing] is grasped as wider in itself, as relatively unlimited."²² To both of these, the quiddity and its instance, Rahner thinks, a human intellect opposes itself, thus bringing its distinctness from its objects to consciousness.

3. *The existence of God.* Having established that human beings can know of things distinct from themselves, Rahner proceeds to the second of his objectives for a Christian philosophy: proving the existence of God. Because "we can know that the totality of the objects of human knowledge is finite only if we reach beyond this finiteness,"²³ Rahner concludes that one cannot reasonably exclude any possible objects of knowledge from the horizon disclosed by the *Vorgriff*. This horizon must include, therefore, at least the idea of a possibly existent God. Yet, Rahner notes, the idea of God "cannot be grasped as objectively merely possible...."²⁴ Inasmuch as one implicitly affirms the at least potential reality of the range of objects disclosed by the *Vorgriff* in every act of knowledge, therefore, one also implicitly affirms the

¹⁸ Ibid.; ebd..

¹⁹ Ibid., 47; ebd., 92.

²⁰ Ibid.; ebd..

²¹ Ibid.; ebd..

²² Ibid., 48; ebd..

²³ Ibid., 50; ebd., 96.

²⁴ Ibid., 51; ebd., 98.

existence of God. "The same necessity," Rahner writes, "that drives us to anticipate being as such [in the *Vorgriff*] makes us co-affirm the infinite being of God."²⁵

Rahner argues, moreover, from an analysis of the act of human judgment that human beings not only co-affirm God necessarily, but also love him necessarily with a love that implies his absolute freedom. For, Rahner reasons, in every act of judgment, a material knower necessarily posits its own existence as distinct from the object of its knowledge; i.e., it affirms something merely contingent, its own existence, absolutely. Yet, Rahner notes, "to posit something contingent absolutely is to will."²⁶ "Such a positing...must be will,"²⁷ according to Rahner, inasmuch as "something contingent...does not have in its *quidditative* essence [i.e. the basis of conceptual reasoning, the province of the intellect] any ground to be absolutely affirmed."²⁸

"It follows," Rahner contends, "that this necessary volitional affirmation can only be conceived as the ratification [*Nachvollzug*: re-enacting] of a *free* absolute positing of something that is not necessary."²⁹ In other words, humanity's positing of itself constitutes an acceptance of its creation by a free God. For without this freedom of God, Rahner explains, humanity's necessary positing of its contingent existence and the intelligibility of being, both of which he regards as indubitably proved, could not co-exist. "Let us suppose," Rahner writes:

that we as human, the contingent reality that is being posited, should derive from a ground that cannot not posit us. Then we have the choice between these two hypotheses: human being, the reality posited, is as necessary as the act by which it is posited. Or the positing cause is of such a nature that any attempt to clarify it, by means of a "logical connection" between it...and what is posited, would be frustrated by the peculiar nature of the cause.³⁰

Neither of these hypotheses, according to Rahner, can hold true. The first must fail, because it denies the manifest contingency of human existence. The second, likewise, must fail "because being, the positing cause, must in final analysis be luminous, and because the connection between a necessary act of positing and a

²⁵ Ibid.; ebd..

²⁶ Ibid., 68; ebd., 130.

²⁷ Ibid.; ebd..

²⁸ Ibid.; ebd..

²⁹ Ibid., 69; ebd.. We italicize "free," because Rahner himself italicizes "*freien*."

³⁰ Ibid.; ebd., 132.

contingent, not necessary object of this act, can never be made luminous.”³¹ Rahner concludes, therefore, that, in order to sustain basic insights about being and human nature, one must affirm the freedom of God’s creation. “The finite may be grasped,” he writes, “only when it is understood as produced by divine freedom.”³²

By “the necessary welcoming of our own existence,”³³ then, human beings “ratify and endorse the act whereby this contingent [human] being has been freely and voluntarily posited as absolute”³⁴ by God. Rahner regards this “ratification” as an implicit, but real, act of love. Insofar as this “voluntary self-affirmation”³⁵ renders possible even the most elementary act of knowing, it follows, according to Rahner, that “love is...the light of knowledge,”³⁶ and knowledge “in final analysis...is but the luminous radiance of love.”³⁷ As a prerequisite for any and all knowledge, Rahner believes, a primordial and “necessary love for God...is [thus] always already given with human existence.”³⁸

4. *An orientation to a possible revelation.* The discovery of this necessary love for God, moreover, significantly advances Rahner’s philosophical project of demonstrating that human beings “have to hear, or better have to listen to, an eventual revelation of the transcendent, supremely free God.”³⁹ Insofar as one necessarily co-affirms the existence of God in every judgment, one can, if one explicitates this knowledge, listen to God for a possible revelation. Insofar as one loves God, it seems, one must.

³¹ Ibid.; ebd..

³² Ibid., 81; ebd., 150.

³³ Ibid., 82; ebd..

³⁴ Ibid., 69; ebd., 132.

³⁵ Ibid., 83; ebd., 154.

³⁶ Ibid., 81; ebd., 150.

³⁷ Ibid.; ebd..

³⁸ Ibid., 86; ebd., 158.

³⁹ Ibid., 11; ebd., 30.

Rahner presumably regards such an understanding of human beings' natural⁴⁰ *potentia oboedientialis* for divine revelation as apologetically advantageous, because it eliminates the possibility that divine revelation might be irrelevant to the merely natural needs and wants of human beings. Rahner insists, nonetheless, that his views on the receptivity of human beings for supernatural revelation do not imply that such revelation forms part of the natural fulfillment theoretically "due" to human beings unstained by original or actual sin.

One could argue, Rahner realizes: a) that the doctrine of the *Vorgriff* implies that human beings naturally desire the beatific vision;⁴¹ b) that the beatific vision is, therefore, "due" to sinless human beings; and c) that any divine revelation short of the beatific vision, at least if granted to sinless human beings, would constitute a mere down payment on the fulfillment owed them rather than a gratuitous gift in the strictest sense of the term. To this line of reasoning, Rahner responds with a twofold argument for the invalidity of inferences from his understanding of the *Vorgriff* to the non-gratuitous character of the beatific vision.

First, he maintains, one can account for the existence of the *Vorgriff* without postulating an exigency in human nature for the beatific vision. In Rahner's words:

We have admitted the absolute range and limitlessness of the human spirit's transcendence as a condition of the possibility of an objective knowledge of finite beings and of human self-subsistence. The purpose of this transcendence is to make possible the peculiar mode of being which turns a finite being into a spiritual being...We have posited and were able to establish this transcendence *only* as the condition of *this* possibility. We have not presented it as a function that had its own *telos* for itself alone. Hence we have no right to demand that this transcendence should...receive a fulfillment other than the one on account of which we have affirmed its existence.⁴²

⁴⁰ That the "ontology of our obediential potency for the free revelation of God" (ibid., 16; ebd., 38), which Rahner constructs in *Hörer des Wortes* concerns a merely natural, as opposed to a supernatural, potency appears from the following remarks:

We may speak of that part of fundamental theology that concerns us here as the ontology of our obediential potency for the free revelation of God. In connection with this formula, we must note at once that we are not speaking of the obediential potency for supernatural life, as our ontic elevation to a share in God's own life, but only of the obediential potency for a listening to an eventual word of God. Should such a word be spoken, we may expect it to occur, at least originally, also within the domain of our natural knowledge, i.e., through concepts and words (ibid.; ebd.).

⁴¹ The beatific vision would constitute a fulfillment of the human being's orientation to all possible objects of knowledge in their original unity insofar as all perfections exhibited by creatures pre-exist in God in an infinitely higher, uncreated mode.

⁴² Ibid., 62-3; ebd., 120.

Second, Rahner argues, the impossibility of establishing, on the basis of philosophy alone, that human beings possess the capacity for strictly immaterial intuition implies the impossibility of establishing, on the basis of philosophy alone, the necessity of such intuition to human beings' fulfillment. Whatever is not demonstrably possible, Rahner seems to reason, is not demonstrably necessary either. Again, in Rahner's words:

In a philosophical anthropology we know only of a human knowledge that demands, as a condition of its possibility, besides the *Vorgriff* toward being as such, the representation of a finite object, to render the *Vorgriff* conscious. It follows that philosophically, we cannot say whether the spirit's transcendental capacity may ever be filled without the help of a finite sense object. We cannot say whether the beatific vision is intrinsically possible, much less whether it is humanity's due.⁴³

Rahner regards these arguments as abundantly sufficient for the purpose of invalidating inferences from his metaphysical anthropology to the "exactedness" of the beatific vision or of any supernatural, divine revelation short of this vision. Nevertheless, he regards these arguments as inadequate to the purpose of proving positively that the beatific vision and, *a fortiori*, partial and preliminary revelations of the mysteries beheld therein are strictly gratuitous. In his words, "Our conclusion that the beatific vision cannot clearly be assigned as humanity's natural end does not yet prove that it is essentially supernatural and utterly undue to humanity; it does not prove that, despite our absolute transcendence, God continues to stand before us as the one who is still unknown, and that in this way there remains an object for an eventual revelation."⁴⁴

The solution to this problem, however, lies ready to hand, in Rahner's view, in the idea of divine freedom. "A free activity," writes Rahner, "is always unpredictable, hence final and unique. Therefore such a revelation [i.e. a divine revelation through history] is not simply the continuation of the manifestation of being that would already, although only inchoatively, have started for us in its definitive and final direction with our natural knowledge of God."⁴⁵ In other words, Rahner reasons, if:

⁴³ Ibid., 63; ebd..

⁴⁴ Ibid., 63; ebd., 122.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71; ebd., 136.

1. God's action is contingent rather than necessary so that one could know what God necessarily is *qua* presupposition of *esse commune* without thereby being able to anticipate the course of his future actions; then

2. achievement of a perfect knowledge of *esse commune*, which, according to Rahner's doctrine of the *Vorgriff*, constitutes the goal of the human intellect's natural striving, would not entail knowledge of God's free interventions in history; and in this case

3. knowledge of God's acts in history would be gratuitous in the strictest sense of the term; for such knowledge would be supplementary to the body of knowledge "deserved" by hypothetical, sinless human beings who, having obeyed God's commandments perfectly, might be said to have "merited" the fulfillment of the natural desire that God implanted in them.

In the early Rahner's view, then, humanity's "necessary, volitional affirmation"⁴⁶ of God's free act of creation supplies the philosopher with sufficient evidence to prove that God is free; and this natural knowledge of divine freedom suffices, furthermore, to prove the absolute gratuity of God's free revelation.

Mere philosophy, moreover, suffices equally, in the young Rahner's view, to prove the intrinsic possibility of "revelation in the theological [i.e., historical/verbal] sense."⁴⁷ To accomplish this task, Rahner appeals to the device of negation. "By denying the limits of...a specified, immediately accessible intensity of being [and] by displacing these limits upwards in the direction of pure being," Rahner claims, "it is possible to determine..., albeit only negatively, extra-mundane beings"⁴⁸ such as God and the angels. Since every object possesses a certain, negatable intensity of being, every object, according to Rahner, can serve as a possible vehicle of divine revelation.

This universal ability of material objects to signify the extra-mundane, however, does not lead Rahner to conclude that "revelation in the theological sense" may occur

⁴⁶ Ibid., 69; ebd., 130.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 73; ebd., 138.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 130; ebd., 228.

in absolutely any manner. Rahner insists rather that “insofar as we are spirit and must therefore reckon with a possible revelation of the free God, and insofar as we can be spirit only as historical beings, we must turn toward the history of humanity, so as to meet in it God’s possible revelation.”⁴⁹ He argues, first, that, as a free act of God after creation, revelation must constitute a “free, hence unforeseeable”⁵⁰ event within human history. Second, the young Rahner believes that if special revelation occurred outside of history or at every place and every moment of human history, this “revelation” would become in some sense equivalent to “an essential element of humanity itself, since we would no longer come to know it as unexpected.”⁵¹ It follows, according to the early Rahner, that humanity must seek divine revelation “as an event that has occurred at a certain point of space and time within the total history of humanity.”⁵² The young Rahner concludes, therefore, that “the human person has to be the being who has to look out in history for possible revelation of the God whom metaphysics makes known to us as the one who is essentially unknown.”⁵³

5. *Conclusion.* In his early philosophical works, then, Rahner achieves, to a certain extent at least, each of the three, central desiderata outlined in the introduction to this section. He succeeds, that is to say, in: a) constructing a coherent and critical account of how human beings come to know both beings and being; b) formulating sensible theistic arguments; and c) establishing that, given the soundness of his more general, anthropological ontology, humans beings are naturally oriented towards a gratuitous, divine revelation, which, if it occurs at all, occurs in the arena of human history.

Rahner’s mature theology, as we shall see, supplements considerably, and in some respects even contradicts, the portrait of God, humanity, and revelation supplied by Rahner’s philosophy alone. The development in Rahner’s thought, however, by no means constitutes a repudiation of the Christian philosophy he cultivated before becoming a theologian in the strictest sense of that term. For the young Rahner considers it a mark of an authentically Christian philosophy that it is “sublated” into

⁴⁹ Ibid., 141-2; ebd., 254.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 134; ebd., 240.

⁵¹ Ibid., 135; ebd..

⁵² Ibid., 136; ebd., 242.

⁵³ Ibid., 9; ebd., 26.

the richer, fuller explanation of existence supplied by revelation. "We mean 'sublated,'" Rahner explains:

in the threefold meaning which this word has for Hegel. First, philosophy sublates itself, i.e., it does away with itself, because it has finished its job, it has exhausted itself in its claim of constituting the best existential foundation for human existence. It is precisely because it assumes and *must* assume this task that it impels us to listen for a message from God and does away with itself as a total explanation of existence. Next, it sublates itself, that is, it lifts itself to a higher level. It reaches this higher level when, as the condition of the possibility for our receiving revelation, it finds its fulfillment on the higher level of a revelation that has really occurred. Finally it is sublated, i.e., it is preserved, because, in the actual hearing of revelation as it takes place in theology, the possibility of hearing a revelation is preserved and has ever again to be actualized.⁵⁴

Rahner's philosophy sublates itself into his theology, as we shall see, in just such a manner.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17-18; ebd., 40, 42.

III. The relation of Rahner's philosophy to his theology

1. *Introduction.* Before examining Rahner's theological synthesis in any detail, however, it behooves us to clarify somewhat further the relation between his philosophy and his theology. In particular, we should like to inquire into the extent and the manner in which Rahner employs, or perhaps abstains from employing, distinctively philosophical arguments in warranting theological claims.

2. *The range of interpretations.* For convenience's sake, we shall follow Karen Kilby in distinguishing interpretations of the philosophy/theology relationship in Rahner's thought into two broad classes: the semi-foundationalist and the non-foundationalist.

a. *The semi-foundationalist interpretation.* Advocates of a "semi-foundationalist" construal of Rahner's thought, Kilby explains, believe that "what Rahner first does as relatively pure philosophy in *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word* he subsequently takes up to become an element in his theology...[so that] the theology...contains, and requires, as one of its elements, specifically philosophical arguments."⁵⁵ Although those who support a semi-foundationalist interpretation "need not go along with some critics in taking Rahner's theology to be entirely derived from and driven by a prior philosophical starting point,"⁵⁶ they do regard some "appeal to an independently demonstrated philosophy as one component in Rahner's theology."⁵⁷

b. *The non-foundationalist interpretation.* Those who adopt the "non-foundationalist" perspective, by contrast, view the seemingly philosophical aspects of Rahner's theology as defensible on exclusively theological grounds. "The same claims," writes Kilby, probably the foremost exponent of the non-foundationalist interpretation, "may function differently in different parts of Rahner's corpus: what

⁵⁵ Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*.

is at one point presented as the conclusion of a philosophical argument may elsewhere function as a theological hypothesis."⁵⁸

"What must be denied, for the non-foundationalist," Kilby continues:

is that Rahner's theology is dependent on a philosophy *formally* distinct from it, [i.e.] on an independently argued philosophy that makes no appeal to revelation. But in a *material* sense, insofar as philosophy is defined not by its method but by its subject matter, it is clearly the case that philosophy is an inner moment of theology: theology, to speak of grace and revelation, must include philosophy in the sense of a reflection on human nature. On the non-foundationalist reading, significant elements of Rahner's own philosophical works do indeed become an inner moment of his theology, but in so doing they remain philosophy only in...a material sense.⁵⁹

3. *Evaluation.* At least three considerations, admittedly, do seem to favor a non-foundationalist construal of the relation between philosophy and theology in Rahner's thought. First, Kilby's formal/material distinction certainly renders the employment of at least materially philosophical terminology and concepts in Rahner's theology much less problematic for the non-foundationalist perspective. Second, significant discontinuities do exist between Rahner's mature theology and his early, philosophical thought. Third and finally, the later Rahner does hold that the immense "gnoseological concupiscence" characteristic of contemporary society renders present-day Christians incapable: a) of adequately synthesizing the knowledge they derive from secular sources with the truths of Christian faith; and b) of evaluating objectively the range of, at least seemingly, radically conflicting philosophies and theologies.

These considerations notwithstanding, the semi-foundationalist understanding of the philosophy/theology relation in Rahner's thought, sc. that of the vast majority of Rahner's interpreters, seems decisively superior to the non-foundationalist interpretation. For, among other considerations, the items adduced above as evidence for the non-foundationalist position seem inconclusive at best.

⁵⁸ Ibid..

⁵⁹ Ibid..

a. Formal vs. material distinctions.

i. Introduction. Kilby's contention, for instance, that the philosophical premises employed in the later Rahner's arguments differ from their strictly theological counterparts materially rather than formally, in that they concern nature instead of grace, seems to run contrary to the later Rahner's understanding of the relation between the supernatural and the natural.

ii. The modally supernatural. For, first, the later Rahner considers nature itself at least "modally supernatural." As he explains:

Since from the start 'nature' is always and irrevocably conceived by God as the presupposed condition of possibility of grace strictly speaking, nature itself cannot be entitatively supernatural grace. But it is always and necessarily endowed with a supernatural finality....It is modally supernatural. The unity and difference of nature and (entitatively supernatural) grace, precisely from the point of view of gratuitousness, result from the same principle. Hence nature is not simply and non-dialectically non-grace. It is not something which—in the actual order of things!—rests on its own foundations and is sufficient 'for itself', even without grace. It is not the substructure which could exist even without the superstructure, but the lower, which though the presupposition of the higher, still depends on the higher, because in the last resort all depends on the highest—who freely willed to be the love that imparts itself.⁶⁰

Since, then, everything is in some sense supernatural according to the later Rahner, one cannot, without contravening the mature Rahner's explicit statements, demarcate the subject matter of philosophy from that of theology by identifying the latter as grace and the former as nature. For, as we have seen, in the later Rahner's view, "nature is not simply and non-dialectically non-grace."

iii. Absence of material distinctions. As Kilby observes,⁶¹ second, the later Rahner believes that human beings, in the present economy, cannot distinguish between: a) those aspects of their constitution that exist purely because of human beings' ordination to grace; and b) those other aspects of their constitution that would belong to them even if God had chosen to create them in a purely natural state.

⁶⁰ "Questions of Controversial Theology on Justification," *TI* iv, 189-218 at 217-18; "Fragen der Kontroverstheologie über die Rechtfertigung," *SzTh* iv, 237-71 at 270-1.

⁶¹ Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 64-7, 73-4.

Prescinding from the first consideration, then, which we consider objectively the weightier of the two, Kilby concludes that, at least within the categories of Rahner's thought, "the distinctive nature of philosophy...is undermined....One can still conceive of a philosophy in the formal sense—a philosophy which makes no appeal to revelation—but this is no longer materially distinct from theology, because the philosopher too lives in and reflects upon a world transformed by grace."⁶²

Kilby grants, in other words, that the later Rahner's emphasis on nature as borne and suffused by grace renders a concrete, material distinction between philosophy and theology impossible. Now, if this is the case, her claim that Rahner, in his theological arguments, appeals to no arguments of a philosophy that is formally distinct from theology implies that Rahner the theologian appeals to no philosophical arguments at all.

iv. Formally philosophical premises. This conclusion, as Kilby would readily admit, is manifestly false. For Rahner the theologian frequently makes remarks like the following: "the same conclusion which we have been able to demonstrate on the basis of a direct dogmatic datum can also be arrived at by approaching the question rather from the standpoint of the philosophy of transcendentality,"⁶³ In defending a modified version of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, likewise, Rahner appeals to the datum that "an authentic metaphysics of the spirit tells us that there are two (and only two!) basic activities of the spirit: knowledge and love."⁶⁴ Similarly, the late Rahner once employs as a premise the following statement: "contemporary philosophy only recognises man's spiritual life in so far as it is also and at the same time material in any given case."⁶⁵

v. Conclusion. To recapitulate, then, our argument for the inconclusiveness of Kilby's first reason: Rahner most definitely does employ philosophical arguments in

⁶² Ibid., Ibid., 74.

⁶³ "Reflections on Methodology in Theology" ["Methodology"], *TI* xi, 68-114 at 104; "Überlegungen zur Methode der Theologie" ["Methode"], *SzTh* ix, 79-126 at 116.

⁶⁴ *Trinity*, 116; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 394.

⁶⁵ "The Intermediate State," *TI* xvii, 114-24 at 120; "Über den 'Zwischenzustand,'" *SzTh* xii, 455-66 at 462.

constructing his theology.⁶⁶ As we have seen, moreover, the all-encompassing character of the supernatural in Rahner's later theology implies that one cannot clearly distinguish, at least in the concrete, the subject matter of philosophy from that of theology. If this is the case, however, then no material distinction between philosophy and theology, as Rahner conceives of them, exists; and to say that the later Rahner's philosophical reasoning is only materially distinct from its theological counterpart is tantamount to saying that the two are not distinct at all. Kilby's opposition of a merely material distinction between philosophy and theology to a more robust, formal distinction, therefore, does not suffice to render the philosophical aspects of the later Rahner's theology innocuous for the non-foundationalist interpretation.

Admittedly, the employment of some other, neither simply formal nor simply material, type of philosophy/theology distinction might conceivably suffice for this task. Admittedly, moreover, the positing of some non-formal distinction between Rahner's philosophy and theology constitutes a brilliant, dialectical maneuver on Kilby's part; it allows her simultaneously to affirm both the non-foundationalist interpretation and the profound significance of philosophy for the later Rahner's thought. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the later Rahner's understanding of the nature/supernature relation renders a concrete, material distinction between philosophy and theology inconceivable. Kilby's insistence that the two differ only materially in the later Rahner's thought thus constitutes not a solution of a difficulty of interpretation, but an implicit and unintentional denial of the obvious: viz. that the later Rahner treats philosophy, in some sense of the term, as an "inner moment of theology."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Rahner describes one of his later essays, for instance, as "a study which unashamedly refuses to observe with too much exactitude the difference between philosophy and theology, but which, on the contrary, freely employs the methods and basic principles of both disciplines" ("Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of the World" ["Immanent and Transcendent"], *TI* x, 273-89 at 273; "Immanente und transzendente Vollendung der Welt" ["Immanente und transzendente"], *SmtWk* xv, 544-56 at 544).

⁶⁷ "Philosophy and Theology," *TI* vi, 71-81 at 72; "Philosophie und Theologie," *SzTh* vi, 91-103 at 93.

b. Discontinuities in Rahner's thought.

i. Introduction. The second item adduced above as evidence for the non-foundationalist construal of the late Rahner's thought, i.e. the existence of significant discontinuities between Rahner's early philosophical presuppositions and his mature theology, seems to buttress the non-foundationalist perspective rather more than the previous consideration. The existence of such discontinuities, however, seems insufficient to falsify the central, "semi-foundationalist" contention that Rahner's "theology...contains, and requires, as one of its elements, specifically philosophical arguments."⁶⁸

Prescinding from the subject of "gnoseological concupiscence," to be addressed in the next section, the relevant discontinuities include: a) that between the early Rahner's understanding of concrete, human nature as roughly equivalent to "pure nature" and the later Rahner's theory of the "supernatural existential"; and b) that between the early Rahner's conception of revelation as categorical and spatio-temporally localized and the later Rahner's doctrine of "transcendental revelation."

ii. The supernatural existential.

α. Introduction. First, the late Rahner, in contrast to the early Rahner, believes that "pure nature," i.e. human nature as it would have existed if God had not called human beings to the beatific vision, does not exist. In Rahner's view, rather, human nature, strictly speaking, always exists in combination with the "supernatural existential": sc. a universal,⁶⁹ unconditional,⁷⁰ unexacted,⁷¹ and inescapable⁷² "burning longing for God himself in the immediacy of his own threefold life."⁷³

⁶⁸ Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 75.

⁶⁹ "Such an existential does not become merited and in this sense 'natural' by the fact that it is present in *all* men as an existential of their concrete existence" (*Foundations*, 127; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 127)

⁷⁰ "This 'ordination' is apprehended not merely as the natural *possibility* of the *potentia oboedientialis*, but as 'unconditional'" ("Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" ["Relationship"], *TI* i, 297-317 at 312, n. 1; "Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade" ["Verhältnis"], *SzTh* i, 323-45 at 338, Anm. 1). The relevant note in the English translation extends from the preceding page.

⁷¹ "This central, abiding existential...is itself to be characterized as unexacted, as 'supernatural'" (*ibid.*, 312-13; *ebd.*, 339). A reality is "unexacted" with respect to a given nature if it is: 1) unneeded

β. Rahner's motive. The late Rahner posits the existence of this existential, at least in part, in order to counteract typically neo-scholastic understandings of human nature.

In neo-scholastic theology, writes Rahner:

it has been usual to presuppose a sharply circumscribed human 'nature' with the help of a concept of nature one-sidedly orientated to the nature of less than human things. It has been felt that one knows quite clearly what *precisely* this human nature is and how far precisely it extends....It is tacitly or explicitly presupposed [moreover] that whatever man comes to know by himself...about himself or in himself belongs to his nature..., and that so a sharply circumscribed concept of man's nature can be produced out of the anthropology of everyday experience and of metaphysics. Thus it is presupposed that the concretely experienced (contingently factual) quiddity of man squarely coincides with man's 'nature' as the concept opposed by theology to the supernatural.⁷⁴

This neo-scholastic equation of humanity's concrete, contingently factual nature with "pure nature," i.e. human nature minus the supernatural, engenders, in Rahner's view, a false dichotomy. Either one must deny that concrete, human nature possesses more than a conditional orientation to the beatific vision and so vindicate the vision's gratuity at the expense of rendering it dispensable to human happiness; or one must ascribe to human nature an unconditional longing for the beatific vision and so affirm the vision's indispensability to human happiness precisely by forfeiting its unexactedness.

γ. Rahner's proposal. Rahner proposes to overcome this, in his view false and destructive, dichotomy by distinguishing between: a) pure nature, i.e. that which must characterize human beings in order for them to be human and would characterize them even if God had not called humanity to a supernatural end; and b) concrete nature, which includes human nature as a moment within itself, but which, in the present order of salvation, includes additional elements that derive solely from the human being's ordination to grace.

by the subjects of this nature for the fulfillment of their natural desires and, therefore 2) unowed by God to the subjects of this nature even if they obey him perfectly.

⁷² "He [i.e. the human being] must have it *always*" (ibid., 311; ebd., 338).

⁷³ Ibid., 312; ebd..

⁷⁴ "Relationship," *TI* i, 298-9; "Verhältnis," *SzTh* i, 324-5.

That human beings actually possess such supernatural elements in their concrete constitution follows ineluctably, in Rahner's view, from God's universal, salvific will. "If God gives creation and man above all a supernatural end and this end is first 'in intentione'," ⁷⁵ writes Rahner, "then man (and the world) *is* by that very fact always and everywhere inwardly other in structure than he would be if he did not have this end, and hence other as well before he has reached this end partially (the grace which justifies) or wholly (the beatific vision)." ⁷⁶ In other words, Rahner reasons, one can plausibly infer from God's antecedent will to bestow the beatific vision on all human beings that he created human beings in such a way that they would constitute apt receptacles for supernatural grace: something he would not have done, or at least would not have done to the same extent, if he had called humanity to a merely natural end.

In Rahner's view, accordingly, human beings universally and inexorably exemplify certain properties that nonetheless do not belong to their nature, in the theological sense of the term. This conclusion, Rahner reasons, implies that human nature, in the world as it actually is, never occurs in isolation; if one can know of it at all, therefore, one can know of it only by abstracting from the supernatural elements that characterize humanity as it exists and then examining what remains. In Rahner's words:

'Nature' in the theological sense (as opposed to nature as the substantial content of an entity always to be encountered in contingent fact), i.e. as the concept contraposed to the supernatural, is consequently a remainder concept (*Restbegriff*). By that is meant that starting as we have done, a reality must be postulated in man which remains over when the supernatural existential as unexacted is subtracted. ⁷⁷

The theologoumenon of the supernatural existential, then, warrants a sharp distinction between pure nature and contingently factual nature. The idea that the natural and the supernatural exist in an integrated fashion in the concrete, human being, moreover, implies that one cannot determine the contents of human nature as such simply by inspecting actual, human persons. One must, rather, have recourse to revelation to distinguish the natural from the supernatural constituents of concretely

⁷⁵ Rahner invokes in this sentence, explains David Coffey, "the Scholastic principle that the end is first *in intentione*, meaning that the end determines everything else about the being under consideration" ("The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential," *TS* 65 [2004], 95-118 at 100).

⁷⁶ "Relationship," *TI* i, 302-3; "Verhältnis," *SzTh* i, 328-9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 313-14; *ebd.*, 340.

existing humanity; and even then, Rahner cautions, one cannot reasonably expect one's data to yield a precise description of pure nature. Again, in Rahner's words:

This 'pure' nature is not...an unambiguous delimitable, de-finable quantity; no neat horizontal (to use Philipp Dessauer's way of putting it) allows of being drawn between this nature and the supernatural (both existential and grace). We never have this postulated pure nature for itself alone, so as in all cases to be able to say exactly what in our existential experience is to be reckoned to its account, what to the account of the supernatural.⁷⁸

Rahner asserts, then, that although human beings inevitably possess the supernatural existential, it does not pertain to their nature in the strictest sense of the term. The supernatural existential and human nature, rather, constitute imprecisely distinguishable components of the internally differentiated, human being; and "pure nature" constitutes an only ambiguously definable entity the possibility of whose existence in isolation one must, however, posit in order to vindicate the unexactedness of supernatural grace.

δ. *Conclusion.* Rahner seems, therefore, to reject his own attempt in *Hörer des Wortes* to construct an ontology of the human being's natural potency⁷⁹ for hearing a possible revelation as: a) overambitious; and b) perhaps even extrinsicist⁸⁰ insofar as, in *Hörer des Wortes*, he does not ascribe to concrete, human beings an unconditional ordination to the beatific vision. At least "the overarching framework of *Hearer of the Word*, and presumably also *Spirit in the World*," then, is, as Kilby correctly observes, "inconsistent with a central theme of Rahner's theology."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 314; ebd., 340-1.

⁷⁹ Cf. n. 40.

⁸⁰ Extrinsicism, the characteristic vice of the neo-scholastics, writes Rahner, is not:

wholly overcome...by emphasizing...that the *potentia oboedientialis* of nature includes nevertheless a kind of velleity, indeed a yearning (only a conditional one of course) for the immediate possession of God in the depths of the essence, and that a spiritual nature cannot really be thought of without this *appetitus*, so that the *potentia oboedientialis* is not simply an absence of contradiction in a purely negative way. For so long as this yearning is really conceived of as conditional and...a half unhappiness is not made out of the finite happiness which would be man's lot without the *visio* and a proper capacity not made out of the *potentia oboedientialis*..., this *desiderium* remains so hypothetical that nature can always become enclosed within its own plane ["Relationship," *TI* i, 303; "Verhältnis," *SzTh* i, 329].

⁸¹ Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 69.

iii. *Transcendental revelation.* Second, the late Rahner, unlike the early Rahner, believes that God's supernatural self-revelation consists primarily not in historical events, but in his gracious bestowal on all human beings of a "supernatural formal object":⁸² i.e. a transcendental horizon of knowing and willing that is objectively identical with himself. This supernatural elevation of humanity's transcendence constitutes a revelation, Rahner asserts:

in the sense of a change of consciousness..., which originates from a free personal self-communication of God in grace. It is therefore absolutely legitimate to call it already a revelation, especially since it already communicates or offers in an ontologically real sense as 'grace' something which also ultimately constitutes the whole content of divine revelation contained in...propositions and human concepts, viz. God and his eternal life itself.⁸³

Rahner, in fact, identifies this transcendental mode of revelation as "the mode on which all other revelation is based."⁸⁴ "One can without hesitation," Rahner writes, "view the material contents of historical revelation as verbalized objectifications of the 'revelation' which is already present in the gratuitous radicalizing of human transcendentality in God's self-communication."⁸⁵

Now, these remarks and the whole idea of "transcendental revelation" seem thoroughly incompatible with the sentiments of the young Rahner as expressed in *Hörer des Wortes*. "It is inadmissible," writes the young Rahner:

that we should be permanently and miraculously raised above our natural way of thinking and of acting by God's revelation. This would ultimately reduce God's free revelation...to be but an essential element of humanity itself, since we would no longer come to know it as the unexpected, as the act of God's freedom with regard to us as already constituted in our essence. Therefore, at least within the existence of the individual human being, the free revelation can occur only at a definite point.⁸⁶

⁸² "A formal object," writes Rahner, "is the *a priori* horizon given in consciousness, under which, in grasping the individual *a posteriori* object, everything is known which is grasped as an object strictly speaking" ("Nature and Grace," *TI* iv, 165-88 at 178; "Natur und Gnade," *SzTh* iv, 209-36 at 225). As to the identity of the human intellect's supernatural, formal object with God, Rahner writes: "The formal *a priori* of faith, in contrast to the natural transcendence of the spirit and its *a priori* relationship,...is none other than the triune God himself in his real self-communication" ("Considerations on the Development of Dogma," *TI* iv, 3-35 at 25-6; *Überlegungen zur Dogmenentwicklung*, *SzTh* iv, 11-50 at 38-9).

⁸³ "History of the World and Salvation-History," *TI* v, 97-114 at 104; "Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte," *SmtWk* x, 590-604 at 596.

⁸⁴ *Foundations*, 150; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 148.

⁸⁵ "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," *TI* xxi, 151-61 at 158; "Glaubensakt und Glaubensinhalt," *SzTh* xv, 152-62 at 158.

⁸⁶ *HW*, 135; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 240, 242.

Once more, accordingly, a central aspect of Rahner's theology stands in stark contradiction to an equally central aspect of his philosophy: a circumstance Kilby correctly regards as evidence against the view that Rahner's early philosophy constitutes a "foundation" for his later, theological synthesis.

iv. Formally philosophical presuppositions. Kilby recognizes, nonetheless, that the elements of dissonance between Rahner's philosophy and his theology do "not rule out the possibility that Rahner might...continue to use *particular arguments* from these works to underpin this same theology."⁸⁷ Nor, we should like to add, do these elements of dissonance preclude the possibility of Rahner's drawing arguments and presuppositions from philosophies not uniquely his own.

It requires little diligence, in fact, to locate instances, in addition to those cited in the previous section, in which Rahner appeals, directly or indirectly, to formally philosophical conclusions in his theological arguments. In defense of the idea that the intellect could possess multiple, formal objects without explicitly distinguishing between them,⁸⁸ for instance, Rahner appeals to "considerations...taken from a metaphysics of the spirit."⁸⁹ Likewise, in discussing the relation between the body and the soul, Rahner writes, "in Thomist metaphysics, which are perfectly justifiable, one is bound to say...."⁹⁰ Even the later Rahner, furthermore, appeals continually to "the axiom of the thomistic metaphysics of knowledge according to which...something which exists is present to itself, to the extent in which it has or is being."⁹¹

v. Conclusion. In spite of the discontinuities between Rahner's early philosophy and his late theology, then, the evidence of Rahner's writings disallows the

⁸⁷ Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 69.

⁸⁸ In the same context, incidentally, Rahner describes this view as a truth, which "for a metaphysics of knowledge, there is no great difficulty in recognizing" ("Nature and Grace," *TI* iv, 178; "Natur und Gnade," *SzTh* iv, 225).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 179; *ebd.*

⁹⁰ "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," *TI* iv, 323-46 at 340, n. 16; "Theologische Prinzipien der Hermeneutik eschatologischer Aussagen," *SzTh* iv, 401-28 at 422, Anm. 16.

⁹¹ "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," *TI* v, 193-215 at 205; "Dogmatische Erwägungen über das Wissen und Selbstbewußtsein Christi," *SzTh* v, 222-45 at 233-4.

conclusion that philosophy, in the formal sense of the term, plays no role in the later Rahner's theological arguments.

c. Gnoseological concupiscence. The third item adduced above as evidence for the non-foundationalist interpretation of the later Rahner's theology, viz. the later Rahner's ascription of far-reaching effects to "gnoseological concupiscence" in contemporary culture, seems somewhat weightier than the two previous considerations. Nonetheless, as we shall attempt to show, it does not suffice to establish that the later Rahner refuses to employ distinctively philosophical reasoning in constructing his later theology.

i. What is gnoseological concupiscence? "By 'gnoseological concupiscence,'" Rahner writes, "I mean the fact that in human awareness there is a pluralism between the various branches of knowledge such that we can never achieve a full or comprehensive view of them all together, and that they can never be integrated into a unified system by man in a way which makes them fully controllable or comprehensible to him."⁹² In Rahner's view, this "gnoseological concupiscence" constitutes a permanent existential of human beings no less than moral concupiscence. "Man is a pluralistic being," he writes, "who can never adequately synthesize the protean manifestations of his reality, his history and his experience—and today less than ever."⁹³ Again, in Rahner's words, gnoseological concupiscence "has been the lot of human beings from time immemorial, since

⁹² "On the Relationship between Theology and the Contemporary Sciences" ["Contemporary Sciences"], *TI* xiii, 94-102 at 95; "Zum Verhältnis zwischen Theologie und heutigen Wissenschaften" ["Heutigen Wissenschaften"], *SmtWk* xv, 704-10 at 705. Rahner conceives of moral concupiscence, incidentally, not as a tendency to sin, but as an irresolvable pluralism between oneself as one is (one's "nature") and oneself as one wishes to be (one's "person"): a pluralism that inhibits sinful decisions as much as it inhibits righteous ones (cf. "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia" ["Concupiscentia"], *TI* i, 347-82 at 360-66; "Zum theologischen Begriff der Konkupiszenz" ["Konkupiszenz"], *SmtWk* viii, 3-32 at 14-19). By thus portraying concupiscence, Rahner seeks to prove that concupiscence is not intrinsically evil and so to vindicate the unexactedness of the gift of integrity from it (*ibid.*, 357, 369-70; *ebd.*, 11, 21-2). Likewise, Rahner conceives of gnoseological concupiscence as essentially morally neutral (cf., e.g., "Theological Reflections on the Problem of Secularisation," *TI* x, 318-48 at 341-7; "Theologische Reflexionen zum Problem der Säkularisation," *SzTh* viii, 637-666 at 661-6).

⁹³ "Transformations in the Church and Secular Society," *TI* xvii, 167-80 at 170; "Kirchliche Wandlungen und Profangesellschaft," *SzTh* xii, 513-28 at 516.

people have always been burdened with errors which were incompatible with other true insights that they had.”⁹⁴

Rahner insists, however, that the explosion of human knowledge in the twentieth century has exacerbated the situation of gnoseological concupiscence enormously. “However limited an individual’s knowledge is when compared with the amount of knowledge available today,” explains Rahner:

it is, nonetheless, still enormous taken in itself and thus it is no longer possible for an individual to gain a full grasp of the mutual consistency of its individual elements. If an individual today should subject his or her knowledge to an honest and objective appraisal, he or she would have to say, “So much knowledge, so many opinions and views from every side have found their way into the storehouse of my consciousness that, try as I may, I really couldn’t tell you anymore if and how it all fits together, and I couldn’t even tell you how even in principle it could be synthesized into a consistent ‘system.’”⁹⁵

In Rahner’s view, accordingly, the vast expansion of human knowledge in the twentieth century has engendered a level of gnoseological concupiscence so acute that reasonable and intelligent human beings cannot honestly claim to have integrated all of the data of their knowledge into a consistent system of ideas.⁹⁶

ii. Contradictions between secular knowledge and faith. As we have already seen, Rahner holds at least three beliefs about the consequences of these unprecedented degrees of gnoseological concupiscence that might seem to exclude the possibility of his consistently employing philosophically derived premises in theological arguments. First, Rahner maintains, existentially significant data exist within the consciousness of contemporary Christians that admit of no reconciliation, in the practical order at least, with the truths of Christianity. “Today’s faith,” in Rahner’s view:

co-exists with positively contradictory elements in some kind of mostly unconscious schizoid state. Even if we suppose that no objective contradictions exist among the particulars in an individual’s consciousness (statements of faith included), these contents are incredibly complex and almost

⁹⁴ “Intellectual Patience with Ourselves,” *TI* xxiii, 38-49 at 44; “Über die intellektuelle Geduld mit sich selbst,” *SzTh* xv, 303-14 at 309.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 308-9.

⁹⁶ “We cannot refrain,” writes Rahner, “from considering others to be obtuse, naïve, and primitive if they are not aware of this fragmentation and fail in their utterances to realize the lack of clarity in their concepts and the inconsistency in their knowledge” (*ibid.*; *ebd.*, 309).

impossible to harmonize. It is practically impossible for individuals to harmonize all the data of consciousness with the contents of the faith, although it is a tenet of faith that such a harmonization is theoretically possible.⁹⁷

Rahner maintains, then, that gnoseological concupiscence affects the individual Christian's consciousness in such a way as implicitly to place Christianity itself, and not merely some or all theological or philosophical systems, in question. Yet Rahner does not take this to mean that one cannot reasonably believe, with an absolute assent of faith, both in Christianity's general truthfulness and in the truthfulness of many, specific, doctrinal claims.

If what he takes to be the practical impossibility of reconciling Christianity with all of the secular data that impinge on one's consciousness does not lead Rahner to renounce Christianity, neither, *a fortiori*, should Rahner's skepticism about the possibility, practically speaking, of refuting all conceivable objections to particular, philosophical theses lead him to renounce their employment in theology. It would be inconsistent, therefore, for the later Rahner to abandon formally philosophical reasoning simply because every philosophical system is inescapably disputable.

iii. Inability to survey the range of philosophies and theologies. Rahner's judgment that no individual can possibly survey the range of existing philosophies and theologies, the second of his theses about gnoseological concupiscence that might seem to favor a non-foundationalist construal of his thought, seems much less consequential in the light of the preceding considerations. Admittedly, Rahner does affirm in no uncertain terms the impotence of individual theologians to comprehend the range of alternative theological and philosophical systems. Of theology, for instance, Rahner writes, "the substance of the theology and the theologies which are possible and actual today can no longer be contained even approximately by the mind of any one individual theologian, or assimilated in the time available to him."⁹⁸ Of philosophy, likewise, he remarks, "Every man and every theologian, although he

⁹⁷ "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe," *TI* xxii, 165-75 at 167; "Offizielle Glaubenslehre der Kirche und faktische Gläubigkeit des Volkes," *SzTh* xvi, 217-30 at 219.

⁹⁸ "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," *TI* xi, 3-23 at 6; "Der Pluralismus in der Theologie und die Einheit des Bekenntnisses in der Kirche," *SzTh* ix, 11-33 at 14.

must philosophise in theology, knows less and less of 'Philosophy', since there are continually more and more philosophies, which no single person can assimilate."⁹⁹

Such remarks, however, do not necessarily suggest skepticism on Rahner's part about the possibility of fruitfully employing philosophy, in the formal sense of the term, as a presupposition and internal component of theology. Obviously, Rahner rejects the view that one can reasonably expect all interested parties to understand and accept conclusions based on the presuppositions of one, particular philosophy. To that extent, moreover, the following remarks of Kilby seem abundantly justified.

To maintain...that a religiously neutral, universally persuasive argument can be developed to demonstrate that everyone is aware of God whether they know it or not is anything but modest and is not very much in line with the affirmation of an inescapable pluralism of philosophies....To think that one could in this way philosophically demonstrate the existence of the *Vorgriff* would be to think that one had found an escape route from pluralism and from the historically conditioned nature of our understanding, that one was somehow able to wriggle one's way underneath it all and build something sturdy and unquestionable on an ahistorical and indubitable basis.¹⁰⁰

Kilby is correct, we repeat, in holding that to affirm the possibility of establishing the existence of the *Vorgriff*, or any other meta-empirical reality, "in this way," i.e. in a way that would be intelligible and persuasive to all persons concerned, would be implicitly to deny the existence of an insurmountable pluralism of philosophies. It is by no means obvious, however, that one could not affirm the possibility of constructing a merely probable, and yet genuinely philosophical, argument for, say, the existence of the *Vorgriff* without implicitly denying the inescapability of pluralism.

Without rejecting Kilby's insight as to the incompatibility of a robust affirmation of pluralism with pretensions to developing universally acceptable philosophical arguments, then, one can allow the possibility that Rahner: a) employs a modest, disputable philosophy in constructing his theological arguments; and yet b) in no way attempts to transcend the irreducible pluralism of philosophies. That Rahner understands himself to employ a philosophy of this unassuming sort in his own theology seems to follow from comments Rahner made in 1965 about the necessity of "metaphysics" in theology.

⁹⁹ "Philosophy and Philosophising in Theology" ["Philosophising"], *TI* ix, 46-63 at 54; "Philosophie und Philosophieren in der Theologie" ["Philosophieren"], *SzTh* viii, 66-87 at 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Karl Rahner*, 96-7.

I am sometimes amazed that theologians are quick to declare that a metaphysics must be false or unsuitable for theology simply because it is a matter of dispute. How can they not see that their own theology too is itself a matter of dispute, and yet they do not straightway regard this as a criterion for saying that their own theology is false? The man who has not the courage to pursue a metaphysics (which is not the same thing as a closed system) cannot be a good theologian. Even when one is conscious of possessing a constantly inadequate metaphysics, it is still possible to rely on it, to use it in addressing the true God and in directing man towards the experience which he always has already from God. For it is man's inalienable blessing that his words say more and purer things than he himself knows and can enclose in his impure words, provided...that his pride does not make him keep silent...because, as soon as he begins to speak about God, his words immediately sound foolish.¹⁰¹

Rahner does not seem to believe, accordingly, that if he cannot survey all of the possible alternatives and objections to his philosophy and cannot hope to make his philosophy universally persuasive, he ought, therefore, to abstain from philosophizing altogether. If the inexorable pluralism of philosophies does not imply that the enterprise of philosophy itself ought to be abandoned, however, Rahner's affirmation of this inexorable pluralism seems quite compatible with his own continued employment of formally philosophical arguments within his theology. In any event, Rahner considers contemporary theology just as pluralistic as philosophy; yet the uncontrollable pluralism of theologies does not lead him to cease formulating distinctively theological arguments. Why, then, should he renounce the employment of formally philosophical reasoning on account of the insurmountable pluralism of philosophies?

These considerations, again, do not detract from the soundness of Kilby's demonstration that the late Rahner's views on pluralism imply the impossibility of a universally intelligible and persuasive philosophy. They do, however, show that if one is willing to include merely probable arguments, whose conclusions do not derive from specifically Christian premises, within the compass of "philosophy in the formal sense of the term"; then Rahner's views on contemporary pluralism do not constitute evidence for the absence of formally philosophical reasoning in his late, theological works.

To this line of reasoning, Kilby would presumably respond that an argument's lack of distinctively Christian premises does not establish that it is formally philosophical rather than formally theological. Kilby would claim, that is to say, that the datum that an argument:

¹⁰¹ "Observations on the Doctrine of God in Catholic Dogmatics," *TI* ix, 127-44 at 138; "Bemerkungen zur Gotteslehre in der katholischen Dogmatik," *SzTh* viii, 165-86 at 178-9.

is not yet *specifically* Christian...means neither that it is not Christian nor that it is justified independently of Christian considerations. It does not follow that it is not Christian, first of all, from the fact that some claim falls into the intersection of Christianity and some other way of interpreting experience (tea is no less an English form of sustenance than crumpets even though the one is consumed elsewhere and the other is not). And second, because it is not a uniquely Christian claim it does not follow that Rahner is trying to justify it on purely general, a-Christian grounds.¹⁰²

Now, Kilby seems correct in insisting that arguments that draw on premises that Christianity holds in common with various philosophies (to speak in un-Rahnerian terms, data contained in both general and special revelation) can, in fact, be formally theological. If, however: 1) an argument or a conclusion within Rahner's theological corpus seems to be formally philosophical; and especially if, as is frequently the case, 2) the seemingly philosophical argument or conclusion appears in much the same guise in Rahner's early, philosophical works; then 3) unless the context or some, specific remark of Rahner suggests otherwise, it appears reasonable to consider the argument in question formally philosophical.

For example, when Rahner writes, "Anyone who has grasped the metaphysical meaning of the scholastic axiom [two sentences later Rahner refers to it as an 'axiom of scholastic metaphysics'] 'ens et verum convertuntur', 'ens est intelligibile et intelligens, in quantum est ens actu', will know that *in principle* at least, every ontic statement...is capable of being translated into an *ontological* one";¹⁰³ he at least appears to appeal to a formally philosophical principle for which he argues vigorously in his early philosophical works. Since: a) Rahner tends to reject "theological hypotheses" such as Ladislaus Boros' *Endentscheidungshypothese* as arbitrary, because their sole justification lies in their usefulness for resolving some theological dilemma;¹⁰⁴ and b) Rahner's acknowledgment of an insurmountable pluralism of philosophies does not lead him to disavow the usefulness of formally philosophical reasoning for theology; it seems that in this and similar cases one cannot plausibly claim that Rahner employs principles like "ens et verum

¹⁰² Karl Rahner, 82.

¹⁰³ "Current Problems in Christology" ["Current Problems"], *TI* i, 149-200 at 169; "Probleme der Christologie von heute" ["Probleme"], *SzTh* i, 169-222 at 189.

¹⁰⁴ Rahner specifically disassociates himself from the views of Boros, his former student, in "Experience of the Spirit and Existential Commitment," *TI* xvi, 24-34 at 25, n. 2 ("Erfahrung des Geistes und existentielle Entscheidung," *SzTh* xii, 41-53 at 41, Anm.2); "The Liberty of the Sick, Theologically Considered," *TI* xvii, 100-113 at 105, n. 6 ("Die Freiheit des Kranken in theologischer Sicht," *SzTh* xii, 439-54 at 444, Anm. 6); "Christian Dying," *TI* xviii, 226-56 at 230 ("Das Christliche Sterben," *SzTh* xiii, 269-304 at 273); and his "Vorwort" to Silvio Zucal's *La teologia della morte in Karl Rahner* (Bologna: EDB, 1983), 4-6 at 6.

convertuntur” as free-standing theological hypotheses without regard to the probative force of philosophical arguments alleged on their behalf. It seems much more likely, rather, that, notwithstanding his acknowledgement of uncontrollable philosophical pluralism, Rahner employs here and elsewhere principles which he himself credits on formally philosophical grounds and which, therefore, qualify as formally philosophical.

This consideration might seem sufficient of itself to establish that Rahner's “theology...contains, and requires, as one of its elements, specifically philosophical arguments;”¹⁰⁵ it might seem sufficient, that is to say, to establish the accuracy of the semi-foundationalist construal of the later Rahner's thought. Kilby, nonetheless, offers two arguments to the contrary, which, in our view, merit some response before we pass to the next section.

First, Kilby maintains, the brevity with which Rahner frequently refers to philosophical conclusions in his theological writings could conceivably indicate that he regards them as a matter of indifference. “The semi-foundationalist,” Kilby writes:

will assume that when Rahner writes something like “[b]ut this philosophical argument for...will not be pursued any further in the present context,” he is not wanting to interrupt his theology with long philosophical discussions, and that he does not need to precisely because he has done it before. But the non-foundationalist can put a different construal on the situation: if Rahner neither offers a full demonstration [of a given philosophical conclusion inserted in a theological argument], nor explicitly point[s] to where he has already set one out, this only underlines the fact that prior philosophical demonstration is not needed for theology—if Rahner assumes that a philosophical demonstration can be given, he also assumes that it is not important to do it because his theological position does not depend on it.¹⁰⁶

Two characteristics of this argument seem particularly striking. First, it is of a purely defensive character. Kilby does not pretend positively to refute what she describes as “the strongest point in favor of a semi-foundationalist reading,”¹⁰⁷ but only to prove that “it is not absolutely decisive.”¹⁰⁸ Second, and more importantly, Kilby seems to posit something of a false dichotomy. Either, she suggests: a) Rahner regards the philosophical arguments to which he alludes as unimportant; or b) he

¹⁰⁵ Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 75.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* Kilby's sentence continues, “and it is a genuinely strong point.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

expects his readers to understand, without being told, that he appeals to arguments advanced in his early, philosophical works. In the latter case, presumably, Rahner would expect his readers either to consult these works or to resign themselves to ignorance of the arguments in question.

Few persons, it seems, if confronted with these two alternatives, would find the second scenario, the only scenario Kilby presents that is compatible with a semi-foundationalist construal of Rahner's thought, even remotely plausible. The prominence of the semi-foundationalist perspective in the secondary literature on Rahner, therefore, strongly suggests that some third explanation of the brevity with which Rahner frequently alludes to points of philosophical interest may be conceivable. We should like, in particular, tentatively to propose the following rationale for this peculiarity in Rahner's style.

The intended audience for the majority of Rahner's theological essays consists in progressive, central European, Roman Catholic theologians. Such persons, whether directly acquainted with *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes* or not, would presumably be broadly familiar with philosophical ideas like the basic identity of being and knowing and the *Horizonthaftigkeit* of human knowledge. Such persons, moreover, would also presumably be familiar with the appropriation and translation into Thomistic terminology of these and similar ideas by Joseph Maréchal and other Maréchalians Thomists: a circle including, but not limited to Gustav Siewerth, Johannes B. Lotz, Max Müller, Emerich Coreth, Bernhard Welte, and Rahner himself. When Rahner, therefore, alludes to typically "transcendental Thomistic" conceptions such as the basic identity of being and knowing, the limitless transcendence of the human spirit, the human being's necessary, but athematic awareness of God, etc., he can reasonably assume his readers' familiarity with these themes. *Pace* Kilby, then, the brevity with which Rahner refers to philosophical arguments in his theological writings may reflect neither the unimportance of philosophical premises in Rahner's later work, nor a desire on his part for readers to consult *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes*. Rahner's brevity may simply reflect his expectations of a readership educated in scholastic philosophy and theology and well-informed about Continental philosophy in the mid-twentieth century.

For the original audiences of some of Rahner's most philosophically dense essays, moreover, these expectations seem eminently reasonable. The essay, "Über den

Begriff des Geheimnisses in der katholischen Theologie,"¹⁰⁹ for instance, certainly presupposes extensive familiarity with a particular blend of neoscholastic and post-Kantian, Continental philosophy. This seems entirely appropriate, however, for the readership of a *Festschrift* for Erich Przywara: the format in which this essay appeared immediately before its inclusion in Rahner's *Schriften*. Rahner's "Dogmatische Erwägungen über das Wissen und Selbstbewußtsein Christi," likewise, presupposes its readers' prior acquaintance with several theses typical of transcendental Thomism: a plausible assumption, it seems, about those to whom Rahner originally delivered the paper as a lecture: viz. the 1961 Catholic theological faculty at Trier.¹¹⁰

In any event, Rahner seems clearly to indicate that he presupposes the reader's acquaintance with the philosophical theses to which he refers in the essay, "Zur Theologie des Symbols:" perhaps the most philosophical of Rahner's late, theological essays. "We choose here a method," he writes, "which will bring us to our goal as quickly and easily as possible, even though it simplifies matters by presupposing ontological and theological principles which would have to be demonstrated, not supposed, in a properly worked out ontology of the symbol. However, in view of the reader who is primarily envisaged here, these presuppositions may be made without misgiving."¹¹¹ One need not choose, therefore, between hypothesizing: a) that philosophy is unimportant to the late Rahner, and that he, therefore, sees little point in clarifying the philosophical arguments he mentions; or b) that Rahner continually refers his readers to *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes*. It seems, rather that Rahner not unreasonably assumes that the progressive, German-speaking, Roman Catholic theologians who constitute his primary audience are already aware of the basic theses of Maréchal Thomism and the arguments for them.

The brevity with which Rahner frequently refers to formally philosophical arguments within his theological works, we repeat, does not appear to betray an attitude of indifference on the later Rahner's part to such arguments in theological

¹⁰⁹ "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology" ["Mystery"], *TI* iv, 36-73; ["Geheimnis"] *SzTh* iv, 51-99.

¹¹⁰ Cf. also Rahner's philosophically sophisticated "Theologische Prinzipien der Hermeneutik eschatologischer Aussagen" (bibliographical data in n. 78), which originated as a lecture to the Catholic theological faculty at Bonn in 1960.

¹¹¹ "The Theology of the Symbol" ["Symbol"], *TI* iv, 221-52 at 225-6, n. 4; "Zur Theologie des Symbols" ["Symbols"], *SmtWk* xviii, 423-57 at 427, Anm. 4.

contexts. As a counterargument to inferences from Rahner's explicit references to philosophical proofs within his theological arguments to the integrality of philosophy to Rahner's theology, therefore, Kilby's argument from brevity does not succeed.

Kilby proposes, however, a second counterargument as well. Assuming, again, that the later Rahner's brief references to philosophical arguments constitute either signs of indifference or implicit instructions to consult *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes*, Kilby claims that:

even if one did take these passages to involve an implicit reference back to Rahner's own early philosophical arguments, though this would count against a nonfoundationalist reading, it would not count *decisively* against it. This is because the real case for a nonfoundationalist reading does not rest on the construal of individual passages....The real case for the nonfoundationalist reading is that it makes possible the most plausible and most coherent reading of Rahner's theology taken as a whole. Even if, then, it turns out that at particular points Rahner makes appeal to his earlier philosophy, the nonfoundationalist would argue that this represents merely a remnant of an earlier kind of thinking, one which is extraneous to the basic drift and at odds with the overall thrust of Rahner's theology.¹¹²

This, it seems, would constitute a weighty argument if Kilby could point to genuine elements of incoherence and implausibility in the alternatives to a non-foundationalist perspective on Rahner's later thought. We have seen, however, that neither the discontinuities between Rahner's early philosophy and his late philosophy, nor the practical impossibility of reconciling one's faith with all of the data of one's consciousness, nor the insuperable pluralism of philosophies (the point on which Kilby lays the greatest stress) poses significant difficulties for the semi-foundationalist position.

4. *Conclusion.* Neither Kilby's distinction between formal and material conceptions of philosophy, nor the sometimes radical discontinuities between the views of the early and the late Rahner, nor even the consequences the late Rahner attributes to rampant gnoseological concupiscence, then, seems to falsify the consensus interpretation of the role of philosophy in Rahner's theology. Philosophy, in the formal sense of the term, actually does function in the mature Rahner's thought as an "inner moment of theology."¹¹³ It seems unreasonable to presuppose a priori,

¹¹² Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 84-5.

¹¹³ "Philosophy and Theology," *TI* vi, 72; "Philosophie und Theologie," *SzTh* vi, 93.

therefore, that Rahner's theological conclusions do not, at any time, depend on formally philosophical premises.

IV. Modification of Rahner's views

1. *Introduction.* Over the course of his long career, as we have already noted, Rahner significantly modifies certain of the views set forth in his early philosophical writings. In order to avoid confusion, therefore, it seems advisable to identify certain of these modifications before proceeding to the substance of our discussion of Rahner's concept of revelation. We have already discussed two of the most significant modifications: viz. Rahner's decisions to maintain 1) that revelation, at least in its most primordial sense, consists not in a spatio-temporally localized *Heilsgeschichte*, but in the universal, transcendental experience of divine self-communication; and 2) that, by virtue of God's self-communication to all human beings without exception, all persons possess a "supernatural existential" by virtue of which they possess an exigency for the beatific vision; in the preceding treatment of the relation between Rahner's philosophy and his theology. In the following two sub-sections, we hope to document and account for, in some measure at least, two other shifts of opinion on Rahner's part: viz. his decisions to hold: a) that God, and not solely *esse commune* as he had previously argued, constitutes the transcendental horizon within which human beings apprehend categorical beings; and b) that, Rahner's early enthusiasm for revelation as history notwithstanding, God never intervenes in the categorical order.

2. *God as the transcendental horizon of human experience.* In his 1939 work, *Geist in Welt*, Rahner denies that God constitutes the horizon of human consciousness in the following terms:

the *esse* apprehended in the pre-apprehension [= the *Vorgriff*]...[is] known implicitly and simultaneously...as able to be limited by quidditative determinations and as already limited....Insofar as this *esse* simultaneously apprehended in the pre-apprehension is able to be limited, it shows itself to be non-absolute, since an absolute necessarily excludes the possibility of limitation. This *esse* apprehended in the pre-apprehension is therefore in itself *esse "commune"* ("common" *esse*).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *SW*, 180-1; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 142.

In other words, since the *esse* apprehended in the *Vorgriff* is subject to limitation, and the divine *esse absolutum* is not, the *esse* apprehended in the *Vorgriff* must be distinct from and inferior to that of God. The Rahner of *Grundkurs*, however, describes God as “this absolute, incomprehensible reality, which is always the ontologically silent horizon of every intellectual and spiritual encounter with realities”¹¹⁵ and “the creative ground of everything which can encounter us within the ultimate horizon which he himself is.”¹¹⁶ The principal reason for this radical alteration of perspective seems clearly to lie in Rahner’s adoption of his later, relatively *outré* theory of divine self-communication.

For one can rephrase the early Rahner’s claim quoted above in the following terms: since the *esse* apprehended in the *Vorgriff* is subject to limitation, and the divine *esse absolutum* is not, the *esse* apprehended in the *Vorgriff* must be inferior to that of God. The later Rahner, presumably, concludes: a) that any change in a perfect being must constitute, in some sense at least, a limitation; and b) that God must change if, in communicating himself, he becomes “the very core of the world’s reality.”¹¹⁷ His understanding of divine self-communication thus impels him, his former convictions notwithstanding, to affirm that God can suffer limitation. The later Rahner, therefore, claims not only that “God...in and in spite of his immutability can become something,”¹¹⁸ but that “this possibility is not a sign of deficiency, but the height of his perfection, which would be less if in addition to being infinite, he could not become less than he (always) is.”¹¹⁹

Now, if God can suffer limitation, no theoretical obstacle inhibits Rahner from identifying him with the horizon of human consciousness. Rahner’s beliefs: a) that divine self-communication renders God “the innermost constitutive element of man;”¹²⁰ and b) that “being..., to the extent that it is being, is knowing,”¹²¹ moreover, seem to imply that all human beings possess a conscious, albeit athematic, awareness of God of the sort that his communication to them as the horizon of their

¹¹⁵ *Foundations*, 77; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81; *ebd.*, 82.

¹¹⁷ “The Specific Character of the Christian Concept of God” [“Specific Character”], *TI* xxi, 185-95 at 191; “Die Eigenart des christlichen Gottesbegriffs” [“Eigenart”], *SzTh* xv, 185-94 at 190.

¹¹⁸ “On the Theology of the Incarnation” [“Incarnation”], *TI* iv, 105-20 at 114, n. 3; “Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung” [“Menschwerdung”], *SzTh* iv, 137-56 at 147, Anm. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

¹²⁰ *Foundations*, 116; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 116.

¹²¹ *HW*, 29; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 62.

transcendence would supply. Rahner's decision to reverse himself on this subject and identify God with the human intellect's horizon, therefore, seems largely attributable to his later ideas about divine self-communication.

3. *Divine intervention in the categorical order.* Although the early Rahner already displays hesitancy about the idea of miracles as exceptions to the laws of nature,¹²² he affirms, nonetheless, that God, on certain occasions at least, produces particular effects in the created order without the mediation of second causes. In his "Theologisches zum Monogenismus," for instance, Rahner, while insisting that "the transcendent divine causality influences the terrestrial course of things in the most discrete and economic way,"¹²³ identifies divine intervention as integral to "saving history" in the following remarks:

That divine activity, of a miraculous kind, is terrestrial which takes place at a fixed point in space and time within the whole of material reality; and there on the one hand is as such observable, and on the other can be recognized as the divine institution of novelty....Such action on the part of God is precisely his action in *saving* history, in which he wishes to reveal himself as someone who conducts a personal dialogue with the spiritual person..., and does not only maintain his sway as transcendent cause of the world itself....In saving history and there alone the transcendent cause steps forth from behind the veil of space and time and conducts a dialogue with man. Otherwise it institutes the world and its otherwise individual, irreducibly separate origins without putting itself as an agent *in* the world. Every occasion on which it does this immediately and necessarily has the character of personal dialogue addressed to man...[i.e.] Revelation, not Creation.¹²⁴

In "Theos im Neuen Testament," likewise, the early Rahner writes, "It is on the basis of a concrete experience of free irruptions into the historical course of the world, novel and unexpected and extrinsic to the world's immanent dynamism, that the men of the New Testament recognize God as a free, transcendent Person."¹²⁵ It seems difficult to dispute, then, that the pre-Vatican II Rahner at least occasionally affirms that God sometimes miraculously intervenes in his creation.

The Rahner of *Grundkurs*, however, emphatically asserts the opposite. "A special 'intervention' of God," he writes:

¹²² Ibid., 142; ebd., 254.

¹²³ "Theological Reflexions on Monogenism," *TI* i, 229-296 at 296; *SzTh* i, 253-322 at 322.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 292-3; ebd., 318-19.

¹²⁵ *TI* i, 79-148 at 108; "Theos im Neuen Testament," *SmtWk* iv, 346-403 at 370.

can only be understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is always already intrinsic to the concrete world. Such an “intervention” of God always takes place, first of all, from out of the fundamental openness of finite matter and of a biological system towards spirit and its history, and, secondly, from out of the openness of the spirit towards the history of the transcendental relationship between God and the created person in their mutual freedom. Consequently, every real intervention of God in his world, although it is free and cannot be deduced, is always only the becoming historical and becoming concrete of that “intervention” in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground.¹²⁶

4. *Conclusion.* Rahner’s views, therefore, evolve quite radically in some instances over the course of his career and do so in ways not irrelevant to his theology of the Trinity. In the following section, we shall focus on Rahner’s concept of revelation and especially on his understanding of the relations that pertain between the categorical aspects of revelation, especially as officially recognized in Scripture, and the transcendental aspect of revelation consisting in God himself as horizon of the human intellect.

¹²⁶ *Foundations*, 87; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 87-8.

V. Revelation as such.¹²⁷

“Scripture,” Rahner writes, “[is] the inspired word of God...and not just debatable theology.”¹²⁸ Yet specifying why and in what sense this thesis holds true, according to Rahner, “is not as easy as it might seem at first sight.”¹²⁹ For the statements of Scripture, as proclaimed and heard, always contain, in his view, a moment of theology. In Rahner’s words:

there is no *proclaimed* revelation except in the form of a *believed* revelation. A *believed*, i.e. heard, revelation always already includes also — insofar as it is a revelation understood, accepted and assimilated—a synthesis of the Word of God and the word of a particular man....Every Word of God which is spoken by men is already, therefore, to a certain extent a reflected word, and to that extent also already a beginning of theology.¹³⁰

This theology, this reflecting on a more primitive revelation, Rahner avers, occurs even in Scripture itself. “It would be absurd,” Rahner writes, “to try to reduce the whole difference between for example the theology of the Synoptics or of the Acts of the Apostles and that of St. Paul to the intervention of a new, direct revelation of God.”¹³¹ One must instead suppose, according to Rahner, that the human authors of Scripture “ponder and reflect on the data of their faith already known to them”¹³² and respond to new questions, experiences, etc. “to the best of their ability in a theological reflection.”¹³³

Indeed, in Rahner’s view, the actual statements of Scripture constitute nothing more than a “conceptual objectification...[which] is secondary in comparison”¹³⁴

¹²⁷ An earlier version of this section appeared in our M.Th. thesis, “Karl Rahner’s Theological Method as a Response to Gnoseological Concupiscence and Cryptogamic Heresy” (Edinburgh, 2001), 41-8.

¹²⁸ “Considerations on the Development of Dogma,” *TI* iv, 6; Überlegungen zur Dogmenentwicklung,” *SzTh* iv, 14-15.

¹²⁹ “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” [“Dogmatic Statement”] *TI* v, 42-66 at 61; “Was ist eine dogmatische Aussage?” [“Dogmatische Aussage”], *SzTh* v, 54-81 at 75.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*; ebd., 75-6.

¹³¹ “Theology in the New Testament” [“New Testament”], *TI* v, 23-41 at 28; “Theologie im Neuen Testament” [“Neues Testament”], *SzTh* v, 33-53 at 38-9.

¹³² *Ibid.*; ebd., 39.

¹³³ *Ibid.*; ebd..

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39; ebd., 51.

with a more “fundamental revelation.”¹³⁵ This revelation, in turn, he considers ultimately identical with a “pre-thematic and transcendental experience”¹³⁶ universally bestowed on human beings. “The express revelation of the word in Christ,” he writes, “is not something that comes to us from without as entirely strange, but only the explicitation of what we already are by grace and what we experience at least incoherently in the limitlessness of our transcendence.”¹³⁷ Rahner affirms, in fact, that “the totality of the message of the Christian faith is in a real sense already given in...transcendental experience.”¹³⁸ The specific difference between Scripture and other forms of theological discourse, therefore, most definitely does not, in Rahner’s view at least, “lie in the fact that in the former there is as it were the pure Word of God alone and in the latter only human reflection.”¹³⁹

The real distinction between the two, Rahner claims, derives from “the peculiar and unique position of Holy Scripture,”¹⁴⁰ which Rahner attempts to articulate in his “Catholic principle of *sola-scriptura*.”¹⁴¹ Such a principle need not conflict with the defined doctrines of his Church, according to Rahner:

*provided that we understand...it to involve also [1] an authoritative attestation and interpretation of holy scripture by the living word of the Church and her magisterium, and [2] an attestation of scripture itself and its authoritative interpretation which cannot be replaced by scripture itself...presupposing, of course [3]...that one does not interpret this principle of the *sola-scriptura* as meaning a prohibition of a living development of the faith of the Church.*¹⁴²

The self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church, in fact, requires such a principle, Rahner contends, for at least three reasons. First, Rahner explains, “by herself testifying absolutely...that the Scriptures are absolutely authoritative:”¹⁴³ that they are just as authoritative, in fact, as the Church’s infallible teaching office, “the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 40; ebd., 52.

¹³⁶ “Contemporary Sciences,” *TI* xiii, 97; “Heutigen Wissenschaften,” *SmtWk* xv, 707.

¹³⁷ “Anonymous Christians,” *TI* vi, 390-98 at 394; “Die Anonymen Christen,” *SzTh* vi, 545-54 at 549.

¹³⁸ “Reflections on Methodology in Theology,” *TI* xi, 109. Likewise, writes Rahner, “Christianity is none else but the deepest reality of the transcendental experience” (“Ideology and Christianity,” *TI* vi 43-58 at 51; “Ideologie und Christentum,” *SmtWk* xv, 395-408 at 402).

¹³⁹ “Dogmatic Statement,” *TI* v, 61; “Dogmatische Aussage,” *SzTh* v, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 62; ebd., 77.

¹⁴¹ “Scripture and Tradition,” *TI* vi, 98-112 at 108; “Heilige Schrift und Tradition,” *SzTh* vi, 121-38 at 132.

¹⁴² Ibid., 107-8; ebd..

¹⁴³ “Inspiration in the Bible,” in *Studies in Modern Theology [SMT]* (W. J. O’Hara et al, trans.; London: Burns & Oates, 1965), 31; *Über die Schriftinspiration* (QD 1; Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1958), 38.

Church seems to involve herself in a contradiction.”¹⁴⁴ For, it seems, one of the authorities cannot but render the other superfluous. If the Church recognizes an infallible and intelligible Bible, “she evacuates the force of her own authoritative ‘infallible’ magistery in favour of the Bible, as the infallible Word of God.”¹⁴⁵ If the Church retains the plenitude of her authority, however, “she subjects the Scripture to her own magisterial interpretation; it is she who decides what the Scriptures can do and say.”¹⁴⁶

One cannot dispose of the latter difficulty, moreover, by claiming “that the Bible cannot interpret itself, that it needs an infallible interpreter.”¹⁴⁷ The person who reasons thus, Rahner avers, “is in effect saying that the Bible can claim no priority over other [ecclesiastical] traditions when it comes to finding out just what is of divine revelation; both are equally in need of a teaching authority if the divine revelation in them is to be unerringly discerned.”¹⁴⁸ In such an event, an infallible book would be superfluous. The “Two-Source Theory,”¹⁴⁹ therefore, according to which Scripture and tradition constitute two, independent sources of doctrine, seems to involve the Roman Catholic theologian in an insoluble dilemma: “why an infallible teaching authority if there is an infallible Scripture? Why an infallible Scripture if there is an infallible teaching authority?”¹⁵⁰

Rahner thinks he can resolve this dilemma by developing a new theory of inspiration which implies, in turn, a less problematic understanding of the relation between Scripture and tradition. According to Rahner, “inspiration does not of itself require an immediate divine intervention into the interior of the human will; it is possible for the will to be moved mediately, by means of created impulses arising within...the author’s concrete empirical experience.”¹⁵¹ Instead, Rahner contends, one can do justice to the traditional doctrine of inspiration simply by asserting that “God wills and produces the Scripture as a constitutive element in the foundation of the Apostolic Church, because and to the extent that it is precisely in this way that he

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.; ebd., 39.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.; ebd..

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.; ebd..

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 32; ebd..

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.; ebd..

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 36; ebd., 43.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 31; ebd., 39.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 22-3; ebd., 31.

wills and effects the Apostolic Church's existence."¹⁵² God constitutes the divine author of Scripture, in other words, insofar as he wills the existence of the Church.

His willing of the Church's existence makes God the "author" of Scripture, according to Rahner, because "the concrete, fully realized essence of the Church includes the Scriptures: they are a constitutive element of her."¹⁵³ "A fundamental character of the Scriptures," Rahner explains, "is the fulfillment of the role...[of] the Apostolic Church as distinct from the later Church: to be not only the earliest phase in time, but also the permanent source, the Canon and norm for the Church of later eras."¹⁵⁴ Before the Church possessed the entire canon of Scripture, therefore, it constituted "an *église naissante*, the Church in the process of birth."¹⁵⁵ By her "production of the Scriptures," however, "she constituted herself the normative law for the Church's future course"¹⁵⁶ and thus brought about the "self-constitution,"¹⁵⁷ the "self-realization"¹⁵⁸ and, indeed, "the completion of the Apostolic Church."¹⁵⁹

This understanding of Scripture as the Church's self-produced and self-imposed doctrinal standard implies, according to Rahner, that "the inspiration of Holy Scripture is nothing else than God's founding of the Church."¹⁶⁰ This thesis, in turn, suggests a means of conceiving of the relation between Scripture and the Church's teaching authority in such a way that neither renders the other superfluous: the "Catholic *sola-scriptura* principle." Such a principle, according to Rahner, if conceived in the terms of his understanding of inspiration, actually confers on the magisterium and Scripture a status of mutual priority.

Insofar as Scripture constitutes "the enduring and unsurpassable *norma normans*, *non normata* for all later dogmatic statements,"¹⁶¹ the magisterium must remain utterly subservient to it. Yet Scripture, according to Rahner, proceeds, to a degree at least, from that very magisterium. "The New Testament authors *were*," Rahner writes, "on this showing, organs of the Church's self-expression."¹⁶² In yielding to

¹⁵² Ibid., 58-9; ebd., 63-4.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 50; ebd., 55.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 51; ebd., 56.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 47; ebd., 53.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 51-2; ebd., 57.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 51; ebd., 56.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 69; ebd., 74.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 79; ebd., 82.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 53; ebd., 58.

¹⁶¹ "Dogmatic Statement," *TI* v, 62; "Dogmatische Aussage," *SzTh* v, 77.

¹⁶² "Inspiration," *SMT*, 76; *Schriftinspiration*, 79.

the authority of Scripture, therefore, the magisterium merely conforms to its own previous edicts. "The infallible teaching authority of the Apostolic Church, in her function for the future, consists in the capacity for creating the Scriptures, while the infallible teaching authority of the later Church consists in the authentic interpretation of the Scriptures."¹⁶³

Rahner's "Catholic principle of *sola scriptura*" with its concomitant view of inspiration, therefore, vindicates his church's self-understanding, first, in the sense that it maintains the authority of both Scripture and tradition while giving no impression of conflict between the two. It thus endows, in Rahner's view, the Roman Catholic understanding of Scripture and tradition with "that measure of intelligibility which...is needed for a solid and enduring faith on the part of the majority of men."¹⁶⁴

Rahner's principle sustains his church's self-understanding, second, to the extent that it engenders "a less embarrassed attitude toward the datum of comparative religion, that non-Christian religions of a high cultural level also have their holy books."¹⁶⁵ Embarrassment at this datum, Rahner thinks, arises from a mythological understanding of inspiration which he intends his theory of inspiration, including the "Catholic *sola scriptura* principle," to replace. According to Rahner's theory, the Bible does not consist in miraculously dictated messages from heaven: the kind of literature which one would expect to find *only* in Christ's mystical body. Instead, Rahner holds, the Bible consists in a document written by the Church to define the Church's beliefs: the kind of writing one would expect to find in any literate religious group. In Rahner's words:

a community will almost necessarily establish itself as historically founded and enduring into the future through the medium of books. It could even be suggested that the origin of books lies here, rather than in the need for private communication. Possession of sacred books is [therefore] something to be expected *a priori* in any religion which possesses a certain level of culture and claims to be a bearer of historical revelation.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ibid., 77; ebd., 80.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 34; ebd., 41.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 81-2; ebd., 84-5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 82; ebd., 85.

For one who accepts Rahner's understanding of inspiration, therefore, "the non-Christian analogies to the Christian Scriptures are no longer a cause of unease,"¹⁶⁷ and, to that extent, Rahner's theology of Scripture sustains the credibility of Christianity.

Third, and, for Rahner, probably quite significantly, his understanding of Scripture's inspiration retains key elements of a traditional, Christian doctrine without invoking divine intervention: a concept Rahner rejects as mythological. If one presupposes his theology of inspiration, Rahner writes, "it seems to me that all that is being said [by the Church] about the Sacred Scripture of the Old and New Testaments — about God as the main author of Scripture, about inspiration, about Scripture as norm, about the inerrancy of Scripture — can be understood without recourse to the miraculous, which does not find credence today."¹⁶⁸

Rahner's theology of Scripture and tradition also concedes to historic Protestantism the material sufficiency of Scripture as a source of Christian doctrine. He does not, however, in so doing adopt a Protestant understanding of the relation between ecclesiastical authority and Scripture. For: a) he maintains that only the Church can identify precisely which books belong to the canon of Scripture; b) he maintains that the Church herself not only receives, but actually produces the Scriptures; and c) he maintains that "the very fact that the Church proclaims a teaching according to the norms of her office...guarantees that the Scriptures are being rightly interpreted."¹⁶⁹ Such a principle, according to Rahner, if conceived in the terms of his theory of inspiration, confers on the magisterium and Scripture a status of mutual priority. "The infallible teaching authority of the Apostolic Church, in her function for the future, consists in the capacity for creating the Scriptures, while the infallible teaching authority of the later Church consists in the authentic interpretation of the Scriptures."¹⁷⁰

In Rahner's view, then, the "infallible" teachings of the post-apostolic Church (excluding the question of the canon) derive, in some sense, from Scripture. Scripture, in turn, derives from the experience of the Biblical authors, which experience derives from certain historical events which, while they provide the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.; ebd..

¹⁶⁸ "Book of God — Book of Human Beings" ["Book of God"], *TI* xxii, 219; "Buch Gottes—Buch der Menschen" ["Buch Gottes"], *SzTh* xvi, 278-91 at 284.

¹⁶⁹ "Inspiration," *SMT*, 77; *Schriftinspiration*, 80-1.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 77; ebd., 80.

material content of categorical revelation, do not, in and of themselves, contain its ultimate and authoritative meaning. This deeper meaning, in Rahner's view, subsists entirely in the divine self-revelation bestowed at all places, in all times, and on all persons in humanity's transcendental experience.

This brief etiology seems to sum up at least the essential elements of Rahner's view of divine revelation. On this understanding, particular truths, like the doctrine of the Trinity, demand the assent of Christians only to the extent that their meaning is contained implicitly in the former levels of revelation.¹⁷¹ In particular, their meaning must be implicitly contained in transcendental experience: the sole origin of the indispensable and formal, as opposed to the dispensable and material, content of revelation.

A "recourse to this originating reality of faith," i.e. transcendental experience, "is [therefore] wholly suitable," in Rahner's view, "to provide a critical criterion for determining the exact meaning and the limitations of a theological statement."¹⁷² Whatever in a dogma reflects this "originating reality" must, in Rahner's view, remain absolutely normative. All else he considers dispensable: "time-conditioned amalgams"¹⁷³ with "no claim to permanent validity."¹⁷⁴

One might object, of course, that this kind of "interpretation" of dogma "might lead eventually to the elimination of what is 'really' meant, a process of elimination leading ultimately to the destruction of any real meaning of a religious statement."¹⁷⁵ Rahner, however, seems to consider such fears unfounded. Of this difficulty, he writes:

it need only be said that a religious statement points not to what is drained of meaning, but to the ineffable mystery that we call God....In other words, these processes of elimination are basically continually recurring events pointing to that mystery and must occur over and over again in the history of abiding religious truth, since this liberating and hopeful approach to the mystery of God must take place in the light of continually new historical situations of truth.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Cf. Rahner, "The Congregation of the Faith and the Commission of Theologians," *TI* xiv, 98-115 at 107; "Glaubenskongregation und Theologenkommission," *SzTh* x, 338-57 at 348-9.

¹⁷² "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow" ["History of Dogma"], *TI* xviii, 3-34 at 20-21; "Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte von gestern für morgen" ["Theologiegeschichte"], *SzTh* xiii, 11-47 at 31.

¹⁷³ "Magisterium and Theology," *TI* xviii, 68; "Lehramt und Theologie," *SzTh* xiii, 85.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

¹⁷⁵ "History of Dogma," *TI* xviii, 16; "Theologiegeschichte," *SzTh* xiii, 26.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

As long as the dogma continues effectively to mediate the transcendental experience of God, Rahner holds, it *ipso facto* retains its true meaning. Rahner identifies, then, the certain, irreducible content of Christian revelation with universal and athematic transcendental experience.

VI. The Revelation of the Trinity

1. Introduction. Rahner's view of the content of Christian revelation renders the doctrine of the Trinity, as traditionally understood, quite problematic. For, in the traditional view, the acts of the Trinitarian persons *ad extra* are absolutely indistinguishable so that neither creation nor grace engenders elements in human experience from which one can legitimately infer the existence of the immanent Trinity. In order for human beings to possess any certain knowledge at all about the tripersonality of God, the traditional view holds, God must reveal this tripersonality to them through a conceptual, and even verbal, revelation. In Rahner's non-miraculous understanding of Christianity, however, the kind of divine intervention necessary for the conveyance of such a revelation simply does not occur. "Every real intervention of God in his world," Rahner writes, "is always only the becoming historical and...concrete of that 'intervention' in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in the world as its self-communicating ground."¹⁷⁷

The very idea of a revelation of something unrelated to humanity and utterly and completely transcendent of human beings and their world, moreover, strikes Rahner, on philosophical grounds, as absurd. For his theory of the unity of being and knowing entails the abandonment of any theory of knowledge according to which the known remains simply external to the knower. As Rahner explains: "Every knowledge of another by man is a mode of his self-knowledge, of his 'subjectivity'; the two are not merely extrinsically synchronized, but intrinsic moments of the one human knowing....This holds also for man's knowledge of God."¹⁷⁸

Even if a verbal revelation could occur, therefore, it would suffice, in Rahner's view, only to convey an unintelligible and insignificant doctrine about the Trinity to

¹⁷⁷ *Foundations*, 87; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 88.

¹⁷⁸ *SW*, 183; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 144.

human beings. In order for human beings to know the Trinity itself, Rahner holds, they must experience God's triune nature in some way in the depths of their own being; indeed, the Trinity must become, in some sense, an aspect of their being. If this "economic Trinity," the Trinity that communicates itself to human beings, does not relate in a very intimate way to the "immanent Trinity," i.e. God as he exists in himself from all eternity, then, in Rahner's view, human beings cannot know of the immanent Trinity. Now, the dogmas which Rahner, the theologian, must uphold dictate, among other things, that certain human beings at least do know explicitly of the immanent Trinity. Such a relationship must, therefore, in his view, exist. In order to assert, explain, and defend the existence of this relationship, then, Rahner develops: 1) a complex and original account of the process whereby God discloses the Trinitarian structure of his inner relations to human beings; and 2) an *a priori* rule¹⁷⁹ that warrants inferences from God's Trinitarian self-revelation to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

2. *Rahner's Grundaxiom.* The rule in question, of course, is Rahner's famous *Grundaxiom*: "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa,"¹⁸⁰ Since, in Rahner's view, this *a priori* dictum constitutes the principle of intelligibility of God's Trinitarian self-revelation, it seems reasonable to us to examine its meaning and grounds before discussing the revelation of the Trinity itself.

a. *Four misconstruals.* In order the more precisely to determine what Rahner's *Grundaxiom* means, we shall first eliminate four, possible misconstruals.

i. *Trivially obvious identity.* First and above all else, Rahner does not posit his *Grundaxiom* in order to affirm a trivially obvious identity of the Trinity with itself. In the words of Philip Cary:

¹⁷⁹ We refer, of course, to Rahner's *Grundaxiom*. Commenting on its apriorism, J. A. Colombo writes, "It is precisely at this point that a danger arises, for it appears that the speaker has taken up a position *ab aeterno* and abandoned the historicity of his own starting point" ("Rahner and His Critics: Lindbeck and Metz," *Thomist* 56 [1992], 71-96 at 79, n. 19).

¹⁸⁰ "Oneness and Threefoldness," *TI* xviii, 114; 'Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit,' *SzTh* xiii, 139. In the following sentence, Rahner writes: "I do not know exactly when and by whom this theological axiom was formulated for the first time."

Rahner must be claiming more than just the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of salvation-history with the three persons of the immanent Trinity; for that is an identity already written into the Creed, which no Trinitarian theology could possibly want to contest....The distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity has never implied that there were two separate Trinities, but only that there is a difference between describing God *in se* and describing the work of God in the economy of salvation.¹⁸¹

ii. Absolute identity. Second, however, Rahner also does not intend for his *Grundaxiom* to affirm an identity so absolute that it renders the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity superfluous. “The ‘immanent’ Trinity,” Rahner’s writes, “is the necessary condition of the possibility of God’s free self-communication”:¹⁸² not that self-communication *simpliciter*.

iii. Copy theory. Nor does Rahner, third, regard the economic Trinity as a mere manifestation of the immanent Trinity through the divine acts of salvation history. God’s “threefold, gratuitous, and free relation to us,” in Rahner’s view, “is not merely a copy or an analogy of the inner Trinity.”¹⁸³ Rahner characterizes the economic Trinity much more as the self-gift of the immanent Trinity to humanity. “God has given himself so fully in his absolute self-communication to the creature,” he writes, “that the ‘immanent’ Trinity becomes the Trinity of the ‘economy of salvation.’”¹⁸⁴ Again, “because God himself and not some created representation of God is involved in the free self-gift of God as mystery, the three-fold form belongs directly to God in his relation to man. Thus the economic Trinity of salvation is ipso facto the immanent Trinity.”¹⁸⁵

The economic Trinity, then, does not, in Rahner’s view, correspond to the immanent Trinity as, for instance, a picture corresponds to the reality it portrays. It

¹⁸¹ “On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity,” *Thomist* 56 (1992), 365-405 at 367.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 102, n. 21; *ebd.*, 384, Anm. 21. As Joseph Wong explains, “If the economic Trinity simply *is* the immanent Trinity, then Rahner’s repeated assertion that the immanent self-expression of God [the Trinitarian processions] is the *presupposed condition* for the free self-utterance *ad extra* [the economy of salvation] would lose its meaning” (*Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* [BSRel 61; Rome: LAS, 1984], 211). Cf. the similar remarks of Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff in his “Die Krise des Gottesbegriffs,” *TQ* 159 (1979), 285-303 at 301.

¹⁸³ *Trinity*, 35; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 337.

¹⁸⁴ “Mystery,” *TI* iv, 69; “Geheimnis,” *SzTh* iv, 95.

¹⁸⁵ “The Hiddenness of God,” *TI* xvi, 227-43 at 240; “Über die Verborgenheit Gottes,” *SzTh* xii, 285-305 at 301.

corresponds to the immanent Trinity, rather, as a person who spends himself for the good of another corresponds to himself as he would exist whether or not he undertook this labor. The economic Trinity, as Rahner understands it, *is* the immanent Trinity pouring itself out in grace.

iv. Merely de facto identity. Rahner, fourth and finally, does not consider this correspondence between the eternal Trinity and the Trinity which communicates itself to humanity as merely *de facto* and unnecessary in itself. Although Rahner allows for and, indeed, insists upon some change in God's being when he communicates himself to others, he nonetheless regards God's triune, internal relatedness as a principle of divine identity which necessarily perdures even through the process of divine self-communication. Rahner denies the possibility, therefore, of a self-communication of God whose internal distinctions differ in any way from those of the immanent Trinity. In his words, "if...there is a real *self*-communication with a real distinction in that which is communicated as such, hence with a real distinction 'for us,' then God must 'in himself' carry this distinction."¹⁸⁶

b. Rahner's actual meaning. By the statement, "the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and vice versa," then, Rahner does mean that divine self-communication "can, *if* occurring in freedom, occur only in the intra-divine manner of the two communications of the one divine essence by the Father to the Son and the Spirit."¹⁸⁷ In other words, the immanent constitution of the Trinity forms a kind of *a priori* law for the divine self-communication *ad extra* such that the structure of the latter cannot but correspond to the structure of the former.¹⁸⁸

c. Rahner's arguments for the Grundaxiom. That such a correspondence must obtain, however, is by no means self-evident. Rahner, after all, famously admits that "he who is not subject to change himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*."¹⁸⁹ If God could alter other facets of his being in something else, it

¹⁸⁶ *Trinity*, 36, n. 34; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 338, Anm. 34.

¹⁸⁷ *Trinity*, 36; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 338.

¹⁸⁸ "The Trinity as present in the economy of salvation," Rahner writes, "necessarily embodies also the Trinity as immanent" ("Methodology," *TI* xi, 108; "Methode," *SzTh* ix, 120).

¹⁸⁹ *Foundations*, 220; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 212.

seems, *prima facie*, that he could also alter the relations between his modes of subsistence. God's simplicity,¹⁹⁰ as classically understood, moreover, would seem to dictate that changes in other facets of God's being could not leave the Trinitarian relations untouched. For, if God is simple, i.e. absolutely uncomposed, then every aspect of his being is essentially, though not necessarily relatively, identical with every other; hence the slightest change in any aspect of a simple God would transform every aspect of that God. It seems, then, that the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could hardly escape the comprehensive metamorphosis entailed by divine becoming. Such becoming, however, forms an indispensable prerequisite to divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it: i.e. "the act whereby God goes out of himself into 'the other' in such a way that he bestows himself upon the other by becoming the other."¹⁹¹

i. The argument from divine self-communication. Rahner contends, nevertheless, in his only explicit argument for the *Grundaxiom*, that precisely because God communicates himself, the relations intrinsic to that communication necessarily correspond to the eternal relations within the immanent Trinity. "The differentiation of the self-communication of God...must," he writes, "belong to God 'in himself,' or otherwise this difference...would do away with God's *self-communication*."¹⁹² Rahner, indeed, seems to regard asymmetry between God's eternal relations and his communicated relations as self-evidently incompatible with a genuine, divine self-communication and, accordingly, never responds explicitly to the difficulty raised above about the implications of change in a simple being. To his credit, however, Rahner does display awareness of a related objection to his position: viz. that even if he could identify an authentically Trinitarian superstructure of religious experience; and even if he could plausibly argue that this superstructure characterizes the God himself who communicates himself to human beings; Rahner could not, it seems, establish that the structure in question 1) characterized this God even before he communicated himself, and 2) would have characterized him even if he had never communicated himself.

¹⁹⁰ Rahner endorses the doctrine of divine simplicity (cf. *Trinity*, 69, 102, n. 21; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 362, 384, Anm. 21), but interprets it in an unconventional sense (cf. *ibid.*, 103; *ebd.*, 384).

¹⁹¹ "Mystery," *TI* iv, 68; "Geheimnis," *SzTh* iv, 93.

¹⁹² *Trinity*, 99-100; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 382. Cf. *Foundations*, 137; *Grundkurs, SmtWk* xxvi, 135-6; and "The Mystery of the Trinity," *TI* xvi, 255-9 at 258; "Um das Geheimnis der Dreifaltigkeit," *SzTh* xii, 320-25 at 323.

In the following passage, for instance, one can discern a preliminary response to the criticism that, if God is not immutable, his inner structure after he communicates himself need not mirror his structure before, or prescinding from, this communication. "The Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος," he writes:

is the condition of the possibility of the Λόγος προφορικός. This does not make of the Logos a mere principle of creation. For if the *verbum prolativum*...is uttered *freely*, thus having its condition in the Father's immanent Word, it must have an "immanent" sense and a meaning for the Father himself. Otherwise the Father's self-expression *ad extra* would either no longer be a free grace, or no "immanent" word could pre-exist in relation to it as the condition of its possibility.¹⁹³

Rahner recognizes, in other words, that one could reasonably conceive of the Logos as "a mere principle of creation" under one, or possibly both, of two conditions. The Logos could constitute a mere principle of creation if: a) the self-communication involved in creation was not a free grace; or b) the Logos did not exist prior to creation. It is the second possibility that interests us here.

By raising the possibility that God first differentiates himself into Father and Logos when he wishes to communicate himself *ad extra*, Rahner displays his awareness that a differentiation within a mutable God's communication of himself need not imply a differentiation within this God prior to, or irrespective of, the communication. He acknowledges, in fact, that "here lies the critical point of the whole question. Why is the Son as the word of the free self-expression of the Father to the world necessarily also the Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος of the Father? Why does the possibility of the Father's self-expression to the world, even as a mere possibility, already imply an inner 'differentiation' in God himself?"¹⁹⁴

Rahner seems, then, clearly to understand the problem: if God can change in communicating himself, why should one assume that the communicated God corresponds to God as he existed before, or as he would have existed without, the self-communication? He attempts, moreover, to supply a rudimentary answer, which, due to the importance of the matter at hand, we quote at length:

First, we may simply point out that the experience of the absolute proximity of the God who communicates himself in Christ is already interpreted in this way by the theology of the New

¹⁹³ *Trinity*, 64; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 358-9.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-5; *ebd.*, 359.

Testament. This theology knows already of a descent Christology [*Deszendenzchristologie*] as an interpretation of an ascent Christology [*Aszendenzchristologie*] in the Synoptics and in the discourses of the Acts of the Apostles. But *how* and *why* did such an interpretation arise—a “theology” developed within the very framework of the history of revelation? Taking a leaf from this biblical interpretation itself we may say: Jesus knew of himself in a peculiar way as the “Son” *as well* with respect to the Father *as also* with respect to men. But this would be impossible if he were simply the Father making himself present and giving himself in a human reality. Let us suppose that...we should, in some kind of Sabellian way, allow the human reality to subsist hypostatically in the Father. In that case we could still in this humanity conceive of a spiritual, free, created subjectivity which might also refer to the Father in adoration, obedience, and so on....It might call this origin in which it subsists “Father.” But as the concrete presence of the Father it could not with respect to *man* experience and express itself as the *Son* of the Father.¹⁹⁵

These remarks, which Rahner himself characterizes as “brief and stammering words,”¹⁹⁶ do, of course, contain significant moments of truth. The central claim of the first half of Rahner’s statement, nonetheless, seems partially gratuitous; and the central claim of the second half seems largely, albeit not entirely, immaterial.

The gratuitous aspect of the first half, naturally, does not consist in Rahner’s acknowledgment of a robust descent Christology in the New Testament, especially in the Johannine literature and the epistles of Paul. The gratuitous aspect of Rahner’s statement lies rather in the undefended assumption that this descent Christology constitutes “an interpretation of an ascent Christology...in the Synoptics and in the discourses of the Acts of the Apostles.” For, first, the New Testament writers themselves do not claim that they reached their descent Christology by drawing conclusions from earlier, more modest claims. On the whole, they either: a) ascribe their Christology to Jesus’ words delivered on earth (Matt 28:19; John 3:13; 8:23, 42, 58; 10:30; 12:45; 14:9; 16:15; 17:5, etc.) and from heaven (Gal 1:11-12; Rev 1:8, 11, 17; 22:13, etc.); or b) simply give no account of their Christology’s origins.

If Rahner wishes to assert that the New Testament writers inferred the pre-existence of Jesus as a distinct divine person from some source other than verbal testimony, moreover, he should explain how this could have occurred. In the passage quoted above, however, which represents Rahner’s principal effort to meet this challenge, Rahner explains, on the basis of Christ’s filial consciousness, not how Jesus’ followers could have recognized him as the pre-existent Son of God, but how they could have recognized him as the Son of God after the decisive event of divine self-communication.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 65; ebd..

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.; ebd..

That, however, is not at all to the point. For the question at hand is not how the disciples could have recognized Jesus as the intra-divine Logos, but rather how the disciples could have known, without simply being told, that the God who, according to Rahner, can and even must metamorphose when communicating himself, must have possessed a Logos prior to this self-communication. Rahner seems, then, not to substantiate his claim that Christ's disciples did, or even could have, inferred the eternal pre-existence of the Logos from their experience of Jesus and his resurrection without explicit, divinely authenticated, verbal testimony; and Rahner does not explain how the early community could have discovered the pre-existence and personality of the Holy Spirit.

It seems doubtful, moreover, that Rahner could explain how the disciples could reasonably have inferred these doctrines from their experience. What experience, short of the beatific vision, would suffice to justify, of itself, an inference to such subtle conclusions? What reason, short of a verbal revelation, moreover, could suffice to prove that a mutable God could not alter the structure of the intra-divine relations when he communicates himself in such a way as to render it impossible for human beings to infer the relational structure of his inner being before he communicated himself from the structure he exhibits in the communication? Rahner seems to supply insufficient evidence for this last proposition, which is equivalent to the *Grundaxiom*; and, if one disallows a verbal revelation, it is difficult to imagine in what such evidence might consist. Rahner's argument for the *Grundaxiom* from divine self-communication, therefore, seems to face practically insuperable objections.

ii. *The argument from the non-occurrence of verbal revelation.* Although Rahner explicitly proposes only one full-fledged argument for the *Grundaxiom*, viz. that from self-communication, a second, implicit argument seems to underlie that from divine self-communication and to account, in large measure, both for Rahner's vigorous advocacy of the *Grundaxiom* and for the theological public's enthusiastic embrace of it. The pith of this argument seems to appear in the following sentence from Rahner's tractate on the Trinity in *Mysterium Salutis*. "For him who rejects our basic thesis," Rahner writes, "the Trinity can *only* be something which, as long as we do not contemplate it immediately in its absolute 'in itself,' can be told about in

purely conceptual statements, in a merely *verbal* revelation, as opposed to God's *salvific activity* in us."¹⁹⁷

In other words, if we understand the thrust of Rahner's thought correctly, Rahner thinks along the following lines: if a) verbal revelation never occurs; and b) the church nonetheless knows the doctrine of the Trinity to be true; then c) the church must possess the capacity to prove this doctrine true without appealing to a verbal revelation. If, moreover d) the economy of salvation constitutes the only possible source of knowledge about the Trinity besides a verbal revelation; then it seems e) that the economy of salvation, by itself, must supply all the data necessary for a valid inference to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Since the economy of salvation could supply sufficient data, apart from a verbal revelation, for a valid inference to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity only if: e) the Trinitarian relations that appear, or seem to appear, in the economy necessarily correspond to those of the immanent Trinity; and f) human beings can ascertain this correspondence and its necessity with certainty in the absence of a verbal revelation; then g) Rahner's *Grundaxiom* must be not only true, but also recognizable as such by human reasoning. On such grounds as these, presumably, Rahner accepts the *Grundaxiom* as virtually self-evident in spite of difficulties such as those addressed in the previous subsection.

d. Conclusion. In Rahner's view, then, one can: a) discern from one's experience of divine self-communication as objectified in Scripture that this communication contains irreducibly distinct, inseparable, and definitely ordered modes of subsistence; and b) by virtue of one's knowledge of the necessary correspondence between οἰκονομία and θεολογία expressed by the *Grundaxiom*, reasonably infer that these modes of subsistence correspond precisely and, indeed, are identical to those of the immanent Trinity. In the foregoing, we have expressed serious reservations about the *a priori* rule by which Rahner seeks to establish the soundness of such an inference.

We have not yet discussed in any detail, however, Rahner's account of the revelatory event which this *a priori* rule allows one to interpret as a revelation of the immanent Trinity: an account, which, as we shall see, proves equally complex and, in some respects, equally problematic as Rahner's defense of the *Grundaxiom*. Before

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 39; ebd., 340.

proceeding to this topic, we would simply like to note that this account, no less than the *Grundaxiom* itself, plays an essential role in justifying Rahner's overall understanding of how God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity. A consistent application of the *Grundaxiom* itself, that is to say, could yield radically unorthodox conclusions if the economy of salvation did not display the proper relational structure. The account of the revelatory event and its Trinitarian structure summarized and critiqued in the next segment, therefore, constitutes an integral aspect of Rahner's case for a revelation of orthodox Trinitarianism mediated through divine self-communication.

3. *The Trinitarian structure of the revelatory event.*

a. Rahner's objective. Rahner seeks to demonstrate that divine revelation displays a Trinitarian structure by analyzing the concept of divine self-communication. In his words, he desires to show "how the Incarnation and the descent of the Spirit can, in the properties we know about them through revelation, be so 'conceptualized' [*auf den 'Begriff gebracht'*], or understood that they look like moments of the *one* self-communication of God, hence as *one* economic Trinity, and not merely as two 'functions' of two divine hypostases, which might be exchanged at will."¹⁹⁸

b. Dual modalities of divine self-communication. Rahner seeks, more specifically, to conceive of divine self-communication in such a way that the very idea implicitly contains within itself dual modalities, corresponding to the missions of the Spirit and the Son, that: a) characterize such a self-communication necessarily; b) are irreducible to each other; and c) relate to each other in a certain *taxis* that corresponds to the *taxis* of the Son and Spirit within the immanent Trinity. In this way, Rahner hopes to render credible his claim that the structure of God's self-communication necessarily mirrors the structure of his inner life.

By divine self-communication, Rahner means, here as elsewhere, "the act whereby God goes out of himself into 'the other' in such a way that he bestows

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 87; ebd., 373-4. Cf. ibid., 84-5; ebd., 372.

himself upon the other by becoming the other.”¹⁹⁹ In Rahner’s view, moreover, divine self-communication includes creation as a moment within itself and renders God “the very core of the world’s reality”²⁰⁰ and “the innermost constitutive element of man.”²⁰¹ In consequence, Rahner reasons, one may characterize divine self-communication in terms of human beings’ experience of it without fear of projecting the merely creaturely into the divine. Such a procedure, he writes, “does not necessarily imply that we add something to this self-communication, which would be extrinsic to it in itself, insofar as it comes from God.”²⁰²

Rahner believes, therefore, that he possesses some basis for speaking of divine self-communication on the basis of human experience, prescinding from the testimony of Scripture and, in fact, produces quite a detailed account of God’s self-communication from precisely this perspective. “Once we presuppose this concept of the self-communication of God,” he writes, “it reveals to us a fourfold group of aspects: (a) Origin—Future; (b) History—Transcendence; (c) Invitation—Acceptance; (d) Knowledge—Love.”²⁰³ By opposing the first of each pair of aspects to the second and understanding the resultant “correlative axes”²⁰⁴ as unities, Rahner holds, one can gain knowledge of the “specific character”²⁰⁵ of the “two basic manners [*Grundweisen*] of the self-communication of God”²⁰⁶ and, therefore, of the nature and relationships of the two divine processions of the Son and Spirit.

¹⁹⁹ “Mystery,” *TI* iv, 68; “Geheimnis,” *SzTh* iv, 93.

²⁰⁰ “Specific Character,” *TI* xxi, 191; “Eigenart,” *SzTh* xv, 190.

²⁰¹ *Foundations*, 116; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 116.

²⁰² *Trinity*, 89; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 375.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 88; *ebd.*, 374.

²⁰⁴ We borrow this term from Emmanuel Durand, “L’autocommunication trinitaire: Concept clé de la *connexio mysteriorum* rahnérianne,” *RT* 102 (2002), 569-613 at 587.

²⁰⁵ *Trinity*, 94; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 378.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

c. Rahner's dyads.

i. Introduction. In order to evaluate Rahner's schematization of the human experience of divine self-communication adequately, it seems, one must, first, gain some sense of why Rahner considers the dyads, origin-future, history-transcendence, invitation-acceptance, and knowledge-love, correlative opposites that correspond to the processions of the Son and the Spirit; and, second, ask whether, given the presuppositions of Rahner's larger theology, these dyads constitute apt representations of the relations between the two divine processions.

ii. Origin-future. "Origin" and "future" belong among the correlative modalities of divine self-communication as experienced by *viatores*, according to Rahner, insofar as: a) divine self-communication possesses "a beginning, in which the addressee of a possible divine self-communication is constituted by the will which decided this self-communication;"²⁰⁷ and b) "this beginning or origin aims at a future (the total communication of God), which should not be considered as that which develops naturally from the beginning, but as something which, despite the latter's finalization towards the future, stands opposed to the beginning as the other moment of something radically new, something separated by a real history of freedom."²⁰⁸

In other words, Rahner identifies: 1) the beginning of divine self-communication with creation itself, either of the individual or of the cosmos or possibly both; and 2) the future of divine self-communication with "the total communication of God," by which Rahner presumably means either the finalization of one's fundamental option for God achieved in death²⁰⁹ or the "recapitulation" of the cosmos into God at the eschaton²¹⁰ or, again, possibly both.

If one prescind from Rahner's knowledge that, according to dogma, the Son's procession logically precedes that of the Spirit, it is difficult to see why Rahner associates "origin" with the procession of the Son rather than that of the Spirit. An understanding of the atonement as a satisfaction of divine justice would, admittedly,

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 91; ebd., 376.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.; ebd..

²⁰⁹ Cf., e.g., "Dogmatic Questions on Easter" ["Easter"], *TI* iv, 121-133 at 128; "Dogmatische Fragen zur Osterfrömmigkeit" ["Osterfrömmigkeit"], *SzTh* iv, 157-72 at 165.

²¹⁰ Cf. *Foundations*, 189; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 184.

guarantee a priority of the Son's work in the economy over the Spirit's insofar as the Son's appeasement of divine wrath would, on such a theory, constitute a prerequisite of God's bestowal of grace on repentant sinners by the Holy Spirit. Rahner, however, pointedly rejects all theories of the atonement that portray Christ's death as a satisfaction or substitution,²¹¹ choosing, instead, to conceive of Christ as savior only to the extent that he constitutes: a) salvation's perfect exemplar, and so its final cause;²¹² and b) the sign of divine self-communication's eschatological irreversibility, and so salvation's "sacramental" cause, which causes salvation by signifying it.²¹³ In "origin" and "future," then, Rahner finds aspects of the human experience of divine self-communication that do seem both correlative and opposed. Their correspondence to the processions of the Son and Spirit respectively, however, seems far from obvious.

iii. History-transcendence. History and transcendence form the second pair of modalities identified by Rahner as constitutive of the human experience of divine self-communication. "There belongs to man," writes Rahner:

essentially the following open difference which we indicate with these two words: the difference (in knowledge and in action) between the concrete object and the "horizon" within which this object comes to stand, between the *apriori* and the *aposteriori* of knowledge and freedom, between the way in which knowledge and activity reach the well-determined concrete here and now (*so* and *not* otherwise) and the open range which knowledge and action anticipate, from whose vantage point, by limiting themselves, they ever again establish the "object," while ever again discovering its contingency.²¹⁴

In this, in itself rather cryptic, sentence, Rahner seems to appeal to a transcendental Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge to endow the terms "history" and "transcendence" with unconventional meanings. If this is the case, one can reasonably identify the "history" to which Rahner refers as the human experience of concrete particulars within the infinite, athematic horizon opened up by the

²¹¹ Cf., e.g., "Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation," *TI* xxi, 255-69 at 265-6; "Versöhnung und Stellvertretung," *SzTh* xv, 251-64 at 261.

²¹² Cf., e.g., "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," *TI* xvii, 39-50 at 46; "Jesus Christus in der nichtchristlichen Religionen," *SzTh* xii, 370-83 at 377.

²¹³ Cf., e.g., "The Christian Understanding of Redemption," *TI* xxi, 239-54 at 250-1; "Das christliche Verständnis der Erlösung," *SzTh* xv, 236-50 at 246-7.

²¹⁴ *Trinity*, 91-2; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 377.

dynamism of the human spirit towards the totality of possible objects of its knowledge and love.

This dynamism, likewise, which is presumably what Rahner means here by “transcendence,” constitutes human beings as knowing subjects over against the particular things of the world by enabling them to perceive themselves and the objects of their sensation as distinct and limited concretizations of the *esse commune* that (along with *esse absolutum* according to the later Rahner) constitutes: a) the horizon within which human subjects experience particular things of the concrete world; and b) the term of their athematic, and yet both conscious and free, primal striving.

“History” and “transcendence,” thus understood, correspond to the missions of the Son and Spirit, as Rahner conceives of them, in that: a) Rahner considers the Incarnation merely the most profound among many manifestations of the same, transcendental, divine self-communication responsible for creation and all events of human history; and b) he identifies the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the divine endowment of all human intellects with a supernatural, formal object: i.e. an *a priori* horizon of consciousness that consists not merely in *esse commune*, but in God himself.

In Rahner’s view, accordingly, just as, according to Christian proclamation, one accepts God’s offer of grace poured out in the Holy Spirit through faith in his Son, so one correctly aligns oneself vis-à-vis one’s supernatural, formal object by faithfully responding to the categorical particulars encountered in concrete experience. Just as “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3), likewise, Rahner believes that categorical particulars can mediate the experience of grace to persons only insofar as these particulars are experienced within a supernaturally elevated, transcendental horizon. One who accepts Rahner’s transcendental-anthropological formulation of the Gospel, therefore, cannot reasonably question the aptness of “history” and “transcendence” as characterizations of the divine missions as experienced by human beings.

iv. Offer-acceptance. Rahner supplies few details, at least in *Mysterium Salutis*, about the third pair of aspects he identifies as constitutive of the human experience of divine self-communication: offer and acceptance. “If,” he writes, “man is the being

with the one duality of origin and future, if he is history in (into) transcendence, and *thus* the free being, then God's self-communication must also mean the difference between *offer* and *acceptance* (the *third* couple of aspects) of this self-communication."²¹⁵

Rahner seems to think, then, that offer and acceptance evidently characterize the human experience of divine self-communication and that they do so in a way that corresponds to the missions of the Son and Spirit if one understands this experience and those missions in the terms in which Rahner describes them. It seems difficult, moreover, reasonably to dispute this verdict. If, as Rahner claims, "God has really and in a strict sense offered *himself* in Jesus,"²¹⁶ after all, "offer" seems an eminently appropriate way to characterize the modality of Christ's presence to the world. Likewise, if the light of faith, through which one accepts God's offer of salvation in Christ, is "brought about by the Spirit and ultimately identical with him,"²¹⁷ then one can fittingly describe the Holy Spirit as present to human beings in the modality of "acceptance."

v. Knowledge-love.

α. The problematic. The fourth and final dyad of modalities identified by Rahner as constitutive of human beings' experience of divine self-communication consists in "*knowledge and love*, [i.e.] actuation of truth and actuation of love."²¹⁸ Although the words, knowledge/truth and will/love, constitute traditional characterizations of the Son and Spirit, Rahner assigns unconventional senses to his terms in order to render them suitable for employment in his transcendental-anthropological account of divine self-communication.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 92; ebd..

²¹⁶ *Foundations*, 280; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 267.

²¹⁷ "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," *TI* iv, 25; *Überlegungen zur Dogmenentwicklung*, *SzTh* iv, 37.

²¹⁸ *Trinity*, 93; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 377.

β. Truth. Specifically, Rahner insists that truth, properly understood:

is not first the correct grasping of a state of affairs. It consists first [rather] in letting our own personal essence come to the fore, positing oneself without dissimulation, accepting oneself and letting this authentic nature come to the fore in truth also in the presence of others....This true "revealing"—letting our nature come to the fore in the presence of others— is (when it includes a free commitment to the other) what we call "fidelity." Hence truth is first the truth which we *do*, the deed in which we firmly posit oneself for oneself and others.²¹⁹

The clearest defense of this understanding of truth in Rahner's corpus appears not, as one might expect, in his early investigations into the metaphysics of knowledge, but in one of Rahner's spiritual writings: the essay, "Über die Wahrhaftigkeit." In the first of three stages of a particular argument about the nature of truth in this essay, Rahner asserts:

Reality is essentially not the objective status of things which cognitive being is 'set over against' as something independent, alien and separate....Reality is ultimately spirit and person, and in the measure that a given reality is not this, is incapable of realizing itself, is not objectified to itself, is not apparent to itself, in the same measure the being of this reality is itself as such weak and lacking in ultimate validity.²²⁰

In other words, Rahner postulates at the outset of his argument the understanding of being as being's-presence-to-itself that he achieves in his early writings on the metaphysics of knowledge. On this basis, then, Rahner asserts in the second stage of his argument: 1) that truth considered as a characteristic of being rather than as a property of statements, consists fundamentally in self-awareness; and 2) that truthfulness in its most primordial sense thus consists in the accurate self-disclosure of one's being to oneself. In Rahner's words:

Truth, as the givenness of a thing to itself, is an intrinsic element in reality itself, so that a given being has being and exists to the extent that it...discloses to itself the truth that is its own nature. From this point of view, therefore, truthfulness is not, in the first instance, a virtue, a moral prescription which regulates human intercourse, but...the self-confrontation of a reality in so far as this self-confrontation

²¹⁹ Ibid., 95-6; ebd., 379-80.

²²⁰ "On Truthfulness," *TI* vii, 229-59 at 257; *SmtWk* x, 447-68 at 466-7.

is faithful and really reproduces this 'being to itself' clearly and luminously, undistorted and really achieved, expressed and really accepted.²²¹

Rahner presumably includes acceptance among the criteria of truthfulness, because, in his view, knowledge and freedom are, at least in their most primordial senses, identical.²²² According to Rahner, then, one can truly know oneself only to the extent that one accepts oneself.

In the third and final stage of the present argument, then, Rahner introduces the notion of truthfulness to others and states explicitly a conclusion implicit in the previous citation: that truth and truthfulness are ultimately identical. Referring back to the last sentence of the previous block quote in which he describes interior truthfulness as "the self-confrontation of a reality in so far as this self-confrontation is faithful," Rahner writes:

It is here, then, that truthfulness towards others as well has its source. It imparts to the other person only what the individual himself is. It makes his own unique personality emerge from its hidden background and appear before that other pure and undistorted. This truthfulness is in the first instance the free self-disclosure of one's personal being as rendered present to one's self, made available to others, the conveying of one's own personal truth to others. And for this reason it is true that truth and truthfulness are at basis the same: the act of uttering one's own truth faithfully to others. Truth is in origin not the emergence of any kind of thing, but the self-bestowal of being upon itself. As such it is essentially personal, and truthfulness is the disclosure precisely of this personal being to others in freedom and love.²²³

In other words, Rahner claims that just as truthfulness towards oneself consists in accurate self-disclosure of one's being to oneself, so truthfulness towards others consists in accurate disclosure of one's being to others. Why Rahner, in this passage, identifies the first kind of truthfulness with truth itself seems relatively clear: one possesses self-awareness, i.e. what Rahner means in this context by truth, to the extent that one faithfully discloses one's being to oneself. How truth, in the sense of self-awareness, can be identical with truthfulness towards others, as Rahner also claims in this passage, seems, by contrast, obscure.

²²¹ Ibid., 257-8; ebd., 467.

²²² Cf. *HW*, 83, 126 (*Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 152, 154, 224); "An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas" ["Incomprehensibility"], *TI* xvi, 244-54 at 254 ("Fragen zur Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes nach Thomas von Aquin" ["Unbegreiflichkeit"], *SzTh* xii, 306-19 at 319).

²²³ "On Truthfulness," *TI* vii, 258; "Über die Wahrhaftigkeit," *SmtWk* x, 467.

The obscurity dissolves, however, when one realizes that, in Rahner's view, truthfulness towards others is a necessary consequence of the self-awareness and self-acceptance that constitute truthfulness towards oneself. It is nothing more than truthfulness towards oneself, that is to say, as this truthfulness manifests itself to other persons. That Rahner does, in fact, understand truthfulness towards others in this manner follows from the following remarks, also taken from the essay "Über die Wahrhaftigkeit," about lying and liars. "What is a liar?" Rahner asks, "or, more precisely: Who finds it necessary to lie?"

Evidently it is he who feels himself insecure,...who has something to hide which in his opinion would, if it were known, lower him in the esteem of others. The liar attaches value to this esteem as if it were something vitally necessary to his existence. In this sense the lie appears as a weapon, presumed to be necessary, in the struggle for self-assertion....Considered in this light, as a weapon necessary for one's self-assertion, the lie must seem, in the long run, unavoidable to anyone who has not been interiorly liberated from himself in interior truthfulness, and found the absolute courage he needs in order to discover his true nature in the infinite mystery of truth....Only one who has hidden his own true and ultimate selfhood in God, and delivered it into his protection, only one who has thereby become secure and unassailable in a truly ultimate sense, finds it no longer necessary...to defend himself. And only one who no longer has to defend himself can in all cases be truthful to his neighbour.²²⁴

Precisely how this quotation resolves the obscurity in the previous citation might, admittedly, seem obscure. Again, however, the obscurity dissolves when one realizes that Rahner identifies self-acceptance, which on account of the presumed identity of knowing and willing constitutes self-awareness and interior truthfulness, with the athematic acceptance of the self-communication of God. "Anyone who really accepts *himself*," Rahner writes, "accepts a mystery in the sense of the infinite emptiness which is man. He accepts himself in the immensity of his unpredictable destiny and—silently, and without premeditation—he accepts the One who has decided to fill this infinite emptiness (which is the mystery of man) with his own infinite fullness (which is the mystery of God)."²²⁵

In Rahner's view, accordingly, the person who is truthful to others is precisely the person who accepts God; and the person who accepts God is the person who accepts himself. If, then, the person who accepts himself is precisely the person who is interiorly truthful, the person who is interiorly truthful is, likewise, truthful to others:

²²⁴ Ibid., 240; ebd., 454-5.

²²⁵ "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," *TI* v, 3-22 at 7-8; "Über die Möglichkeit des Glaubens heute," *SmtWk* x, 574-89 at 578.

in which case truthfulness to others constitutes nothing other than interior truthfulness as it manifests itself in interpersonal relations. Now, if exterior truthfulness is interior truthfulness, and interior truthfulness is truth itself, then it seems that truth does consist in “letting our own personal essence come to the fore, positing ourself without dissimulation, accepting oneself and letting this authentic nature come to the fore in truth also in the presence of others.”²²⁶ Given Rahner’s presuppositions, then, his definition of truth seems quite accurate.

γ. Love. Rahner says relatively little, by comparison, in his two, principal statements about love as a modality of divine self-communication. In the first statement, by which Rahner seeks to refute the view that the human spirit possesses three basic modalities rather than two, Rahner writes, “If we understand will, freedom, ‘good’ in their true and total essence, that is, above all, not only as a mere drive but as love for a person, a love which does not simply strive towards this person but rests in his full goodness and ‘splendor,’ *then* we can see *no* reason for adding a third and higher power to this duality.”²²⁷

In the second statement, by which Rahner seeks to vindicate the appropriateness of placing love alongside “transcendence-futurity-acceptance of the future”²²⁸ on the axis representing characteristics of the Spirit’s mission, Rahner writes, “The self-communication which wills itself absolutely and creates the possibility of its acceptance and this acceptance itself, is precisely what is meant by love. It is the specifically divine ‘case’ of love, because it creates its own acceptance and because this love is the freely offered and accepted self-communication of the ‘person.’”²²⁹

These brief remarks about the nature of love seem self-explanatory. In their similarities and contrasts with Rahner’s statements about truth, however, they are rife with implications. The concern Rahner evinces in the first remark for demonstrating that truth and love require no complement, for instance, may explain why Rahner employs an expansive definition of truth, encompassing truth as a characteristic of being, truthfulness towards oneself, truthfulness towards others, and even, in a secondary sense, truth as correspondence between thought and reality.²³⁰ Rahner’s

²²⁶ *Trinity*, 95-6; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 379-80.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-4; *ebd.*, 378.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 97; *ebd.*, 381.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-8; *ebd.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95, n. 14; *ebd.*, 379, Anm. 14.

second statement about love, in which he seeks to characterize the “specifically divine ‘case’ of love,” however, at least hints at the limitations of Rahner’s definition of truth.

δ. *Criticism.* This definition’s principal limitation seems to consist in Rahner’s failure to distinguish between truth’s notional and essential senses. Rahner defines truth, and to a lesser extent love as well, that is to say, without regard to the distinction between essential properties, which the divine persons possess in common and which correspond to created analogates; and notional properties, i.e. the purely relative properties that distinguish the divine persons and which, as purely relative, have no created counterparts. In one sense, admittedly, Rahner is quite justified in ignoring this distinction. For: a) the divine relations being objectively identical with the divine essence, one can never experience one in the concrete without also experiencing the other;²³¹ and b) as Rahner himself, somewhat surprisingly, notes, “a ‘personal,’ ‘notional’ concept of the word and ‘inclination’ of love cannot be derived from human experience.”²³²

To the extent that Rahner describes the modalities of divine self-communication precisely in order to show how the economic Trinity that human beings experience corresponds to the immanent Trinity, however, Rahner’s failure to differentiate between essential and notional properties defeats his purpose. For Rahner admits that the “Father, Son, and Spirit are only ‘relatively’ distinct”:²³³ “the persons are distinct,” he writes, “only through their *esse ad.*”²³⁴ He admits, moreover, that in all other aspects of their being, including knowledge (= self-presence) and love (=will), the divine persons are absolutely identical: “there exists in God,” he writes, “only *one* power, *one* will, only one self-presence, a unique activity, a unique beatitude, and so forth.”²³⁵

Rahner implicitly acknowledges, therefore, that if one equates the distinction between the Logos and the Spirit *qua* communicated with the distinction between divine knowledge and divine love *simpliciter*, one posits a non-relative distinction

²³¹ “In both ‘economic’ self-communications of God,” Rahner writes, “he is given in his (essential) fullness” (ibid., 116; ebd., 394).

²³² Ibid., 19; ebd., 326.

²³³ Ibid., 68; ebd., 361.

²³⁴ Ibid., 71; ebd., 363.

²³⁵ Ibid., 75; ebd., 366.

between the divine persons in the economy of salvation. Now, the existence of such a distinction in the economy of salvation would imply one of two consequences, neither of which is acceptable to Rahner: either a) non-relative distinctions must exist within the immanent Trinity; or b) the economic Trinity does not correspond precisely to the immanent Trinity.

It would be unfair, of course, to claim that Rahner equates the modalities of the Son's and the Spirit's communication *ad extra* with divine knowledge and love *simpliciter*. As we have seen, Rahner takes particular care to depict the love that constitutes a modality of the Spirit's communication *ad extra* in such a way that one can neither equate it with the love of God *in se* nor with a merely human, interpersonal love. Nevertheless, Rahner does seem to operate with "global" conceptions of knowledge and love, whose essential and notional moments remain undifferentiated. It seems, therefore, that one can reasonably apply to Rahner a criticism he levels against scholastic theologians who, like himself, attempt to correlate the divine processions with knowledge and love. The scholastic theologian's "Augustinian-psychological speculations on the Trinity," Rahner writes:

result in that well-known quandary which makes all of his marvelous profundity look so utterly vacuous: for he begins from a human philosophical concept of knowledge and love, and from this concept develops a concept of the word and 'inclination' of love; and now, after having speculatively applied these concepts to the Trinity, he must admit that this application fails, because he has clung to the 'essential' concept of knowledge and love, because a 'personal,' 'notional' concept of the word and 'inclination' of love cannot be derived from human experience.²³⁶

Rahner's unwillingness to distinguish between notional and essential senses of knowledge and love, therefore, renders the dyad "knowledge-love," as Rahner characterizes it at least, inapt for the task to which Rahner puts it: viz. specifying the process by which the relations of Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation mirror their relations in the immanent Trinity.

vi. Evaluation. Rahner neglects, in fact, to distinguish between the notional and the essential significance of any of his four dyads. It seems, accordingly, that one can reasonably generalize our unfavorable conclusions about Rahner's treatment of

²³⁶ Ibid., 19; ebd., 326.

knowledge and love to each of the four dyads, at least as Rahner unfolds their content.

d. Results. Rahner's attempt to generate a concept of divine self-communication that manifests how such a communication contains two correlative and irreducible modalities that relate to each other precisely as the processions of the Son and Spirit relate to each other in the immanent Trinity, therefore, seems unsuccessful. Rahner's lack of success in this endeavor, nonetheless, in no way invalidates his *Grundaxiom*. The weaknesses of his systematic conception of divine self-communication as Trinitarian indicate at most, rather, that Rahner's treatment of the relation between the Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation would have benefited from attention to certain "subtle considerations of school theology,"²³⁷ such as the distinction between notional and essential truth, which Rahner chooses to ignore.²³⁸

²³⁷ Ibid., 81; ebd., 370.

²³⁸ Cf. Ghislain Lafont's more pointed criticisms of Rahner along the same lines in his *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jésus-Christ?* (Cogitatio Fidei; Paris: Cerf, 1969), 202-5, 208-9, 216.

VII. Conclusion.

Both Rahner's *Grundaxiom* and his account of the event of Trinitarian self-revelation, therefore, face formidable difficulties to which he supplies no unambiguously satisfactory response. These difficulties, however, by no means render the critique of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* mounted in the following two chapters superfluous. For one could plausibly argue that an implicit answer to our concerns about change in a simple being appears in Rahner's dialectical understanding of God's immutability in himself and mutability in another and/or in his equally dialectical understanding of divine self-communication. We intend to address these possibilities, accordingly, in chapter two.

Likewise, one could plausibly argue that the *Grundaxiom* or a close analogate of it like Eberhard Jüngel's "God corresponds to himself,"²³⁹ possesses, if not unmistakable warrant, at least sufficient plausibility to serve as a basis for the theology of the Trinity in the absence of a verbal revelation. In chapter three, therefore we intend to show that, even if one granted the soundness of the *Grundaxiom*, one could not derive the orthodox, Latin doctrine of the Trinity from the economy of salvation with its aid, because: a) Rahner's explicit statements about the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity preclude the possibility of the Trinitarian persons' indicating their distinctness by their actions; and b) the New Testament accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, entail consequences unacceptable to Rahner and Latin Trinitarians in general. The brief, preliminary criticisms of this chapter, therefore, convey some sense of why one might question the soundness of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*. They hardly suffice, however, for a comprehensive refutation.

²³⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Horton Harris, tr.; SJTh.OP; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 24.

Chapter 2: Counterarguments on Rahner's Behalf

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we introduced Rahner's views on the revelation of the Trinity while leveling two preliminary criticisms of his idea of the identity of the economic and the immanent Trinity. First, we argued, if God is simple, as Rahner admits, then the slightest change in any aspect of his being would effect more or less radical changes in every aspect of his being. It seems, then, that if God must change in order to communicate himself, as Rahner maintains he must, then the intra-Trinitarian relations of God as communicated must differ in some measure from those relations as they subsist eternally and necessarily in the immanent Trinity

We also noted that Trinitarian patterns within the experience of divine self-communication and its objectification in salvation history seem not, by themselves, to warrant inferences to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. For, if God could alter his very being, then it would seem difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish novel from permanent aspects of that being on the basis of mere religious experience. We examined Rahner's response, to the extent that he supplies one, to this criticism in the last chapter, moreover, and found it wanting in crucial respects.

We have yet to explore the resources offered by Rahner's theology for a response to the first criticism. It seems vitally necessary for us to explore these resources, however, insofar as a successful rebuttal of the first criticism would seem to blunt the force of the second considerably. If one assumed, that is to say, that God reveals himself only through the experience of divine self-communication, then one would have reason to suspect that the relational structure of the divine being as communicated in time corresponds rather exactly to that which characterizes him in eternity. Admittedly, one could not deduce the point, but if: 1) the experience of divine self-communication did constitute the sole medium of revelation; and 2) if one could vindicate Rahner's vision of becoming in a simple being from the charge of absurdity; then, it seems, 3) one could reasonably hope that one's experience of God

pro nobis corresponds in some analogous way to God's being *in se*. There is a certain intrinsic plausibility to the dictum, "God corresponds to himself."²⁴⁰

In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, we shall: a) rehearse some of Rahner's emphatic statements in favor of both classical and quasi-Hegelian understandings of the divine attributes in order to illustrate the tension in Rahner's thought exploited by the second criticism; b) analyze Bert van der Heijden's argument that Rahner's views on divine self-communication, when correctly interpreted, do not ultimately conflict with the doctrine of divine immutability; and c) assess an indirect argument concerning sanctifying grace and the Incarnation for the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability, simplicity, etc. with Rahner's views on divine self-communication.

²⁴⁰ Ibid..

II. Divine Transcendence and Self-Communication

1. Introduction. We intend in this section, as we just announced, to document the tension in Rahner's thought between divine transcendence and divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it and thus to demonstrate the relevance of the first criticism in the context of an immanent critique of Rahner's position.

2. Rahner's acknowledgement of divine transcendence. Throughout his corpus, Rahner upholds, at least guardedly and with qualifications, at least six elements of classical theism that might seem to exclude his understanding of divine self-communication peremptorily.

a. Simplicity. Rahner states, first, that "God...is absolutely 'simple' precisely because of his infinite fullness of being (because every differentiation in a common dimension of being is an indication of reference to another and so bespeaks finitude), so that everything (not merely relatively) plural, antagonistic, and contradictory is an indication of non-divine worldliness."²⁴¹ In other words, "God...is absolute and simple spirit."²⁴²

b. Immutability. Rahner affirms in various places, second, that "God is and remains unchangeable in himself."²⁴³ Christians, Rahner writes, and "all really theistic philosophers...proclaim God as the 'Unchangeable', he who simply *is*—*actus purus*—who...possesses from eternity to eternity the absolute, unwavering...fullness of what he is."²⁴⁴ They proclaim these things, moreover, "not," in Rahner's view, "only under the tyranny of a rigid metaphysics of infinity";²⁴⁵ they "say it because we need someone who is not as we are, so that we may be redeemed in that which we are."²⁴⁶ Rahner, in fine, affirms in no uncertain terms God's immutability.

²⁴¹ "Gott V. Die Lehre des kirchl. Lehramtes," *LThK*² iv in *SmtWk* xvii/i, 264-7 at 266.

²⁴² "Immanent and Transcendent," *TI* x, 287; "Immanente und transzendente," *SmtWk* xv, 555.

²⁴³ "Christology Today," *TI* xxi, 220-27 at 222; "Christologie heute," *SzTh* xv, 217-24 at 219.

²⁴⁴ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 112; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 145.

²⁴⁵ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 178; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 198.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; ebd., 198-9.

c. Atemporality. Rahner, third, avows his belief in God's atemporality. "Christian theology must hold firm," he writes, "to the 'immutability' and 'eternal' timelessness of God 'in themselves.'"²⁴⁷

d. Impassibility. He does not shrink, moreover, fourth, from affirming God's impassibility even in the death of the God-Man on the cross. "Jesus' fate," he writes, "does not impinge upon God's own life, with its metahistorical character and its freedom from suffering and its beatitude without guilt, since God's reality and Jesus' creatureliness remain unmixed."²⁴⁸ Even through the darkness of Golgotha, Rahner affirms, the eternal Logos "has remained eternally the same, untouched."²⁴⁹ Rahner, in other words, seems at times to evince a firm and uncompromising faith in the impassibility of God.

e. No real relations to the world. Indeed, fifth, Rahner endorses that perennial quarry for critics of classical theism, the doctrine that God has no real relations to the world. The deity, he writes, "cannot experience himself as defined in relation to another or limited by another."²⁵⁰ God possesses, according to Rahner, "infinite and abiding unrelatedness."²⁵¹

f. Distinctness from the world. Sixth and finally, Rahner maintains that God "inexpressibly transcends everything that is or can be thought outside himself."²⁵² He insists on "a radical distinction between God and the world."²⁵³

Rahner, then, admits that God transcends the world in at least six respects. He does not partake of its: 1) composition; 2) mutability; 3) temporality; or 4) passibility. Indeed; 5) he does not even possess real relations to it so that one can justly consider

²⁴⁷ "Theological Observations on the Concept of Time" ["Concept of Time"], *TI* xi, 288-308 at 307; "Theologische Bemerkungen zum Zeitbegriff" ["Zeitbegriff"], *SmtWk* xv, 622-37 at 636.

²⁴⁸ "Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life," *TI* xxi, 208-19 at 215; "Jesus Christus—Sinn des Lebens," *SzTh* xv, 206-16 at 212.

²⁴⁹ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 178; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 198.

²⁵⁰ *Foundations*, 74; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 75.

²⁵¹ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 114; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 148.

²⁵² "Priest and Poet," *TI* iii, 294-317 at 309; "Priester und Dichter," *SzTh* iii, 349-75 at 366.

²⁵³ "Specific Character," *TI* xxi, 191; "Eigenart," *SzTh* xv, 190.

him 6) radically distinct from it. Rahner, in sum, endorses, at least occasionally and with, as we shall see, severe qualifications, a fairly traditional understanding of divine transcendence.

3. *Absolute self-communication.* Rahner expresses views on divine self-communication, however, that seem to conflict with his guarded endorsements of classical theism.

a. *"God becomes world."* Rahner's avowals of divine transcendence notwithstanding, for instance, he insists on the existence of an "immediate self-communication of God in quasi-formal causality"²⁵⁴ to human beings. As he explains:

When we speak of God's self-communication, we should not understand this term in the sense that God would say something *about* himself in some revelation or other. The term "self-communication" is really intended to signify that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man.²⁵⁵

In Rahner's view, this implies that humanity constitutes "the event [*Ereignis*] of God's absolute self-communication."²⁵⁶ "When God 'lets *himself* go out of himself,'" he writes, "then there appears man."²⁵⁷ Again, "if God wills to become non-God, man comes to be."²⁵⁸ Rahner seems very much to consider humanity the product of God's "self-alienation"²⁵⁹ and "self-exteriorization."²⁶⁰

By no means, moreover, does he restrict this radical self-communication of God to human beings. "There is no problem," he writes, "in understanding what is called creation as a partial moment in the process in which God becomes world."²⁶¹ God,

²⁵⁴ "Mystery," *TI* iv, 66; "Geheimnis," *SzTh* iv, 91.

²⁵⁵ *Foundations*, 116; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 116.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119; *ebd.*, 119.

²⁵⁷ "Thoughts on the Theology of Christmas" ["Theology of Christmas"], *TI* iii, 24-34 at 32; "Zur Theologie der Weihnachtsfeier" ["Theologie der Weihnachtsfeier"], *SzTh* iii, 35-46 at 44.

²⁵⁸ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 116; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 150.

²⁵⁹ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 176, n. 1; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 196, Anm. 1.

²⁶⁰ "Symbol," *TI* iv, 239; "Symbols," *SmtWk* xviii, 439. Cf. also "Nature and Grace," *TI* iv, 176; "Natur und Gnade," *SzTh* iv, 222.

²⁶¹ *Foundations*, 197; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 190. Cf. "Christianity and the 'New Man'" ["'New Man'"], *TI* v, 135-53 at 147; "Das Christentum und der 'Neue Mensch'" ["'Neue Mensch'"], *SmtWk* xv, 138-53 at 148.

according to Rahner, "has inserted himself into the world as its innermost *entelecheia*"²⁶² and as such propels it towards a final "recapitulation into itself and into its ground."²⁶³ By divine self-communication, then, Rahner seems to mean an act which renders "God himself...the very core of the world's reality."²⁶⁴

b. Real relations to the world. When speaking of the Incarnation, which he considers a singularly potent instance of divine self-communication, furthermore, Rahner seems to contradict his endorsements, in a different context, of divine unrelatedness. "We, scholastics," he writes, "we say frequently that God has no real relations *ad extra*. This formula expresses something true, but, nevertheless, who is this God who has no real relation to me? This is absurd."²⁶⁵ Rahner affirms, then, that his idea of divine self-communication, at least in this instance, nullifies any straightforward assertion of divine unrelatedness, and, accordingly, declares "the assertion of...the lack of any real relation between God and the world,"²⁶⁶ a "dialectical statement."²⁶⁷

c. Temporality. Similarly, in the context of the Incarnation understood as self-communication, Rahner asserts that "God *himself*...undergoes history, change, and so too time; the time of the world is his own history"²⁶⁸ and thus seems to contradict his affirmations of divine atemporality.

d. Passibility. Likewise, Rahner insists on affirming the "death of God,"²⁶⁹ i.e. not merely the death of his human nature, in Christ's crucifixion: a sentiment difficult to reconcile with his statements quoted above in support of divine impassibility.

²⁶² "The Position of Christology in the Church Between Exegesis and Dogmatics" ["Position of Christology"], *TI* xi, 185-214 at 200; "Kirchliche Christologie zwischen Exegese und Dogmatik" ["Kirchliche Christologie"], *SzTh* ix, 197-226 at 213.

²⁶³ *Foundations*, 189; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 184.

²⁶⁴ "Specific Character," *TI* xxi, 191; "Eigenart," *SzTh* xv, 190.

²⁶⁵ "Débats sur le rapport du P. Rahner," in Henri Bouëssé and J. J. Latour, ed., *Problèmes actuels de Christologie: Travaux du Symposium de L'arbresle 1961* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 407.

²⁶⁶ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 181, n. 3; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 202, Anm. 2.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

²⁶⁸ "Concept of Time," *TI* xi, 307-8; "Zeitbegriff," *SmtWk* xv, 636.

²⁶⁹ *Foundations*, 305; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 290.

e. Mutability. Rahner does not attempt, moreover, pellucidly to reconcile his understanding of divine self-communication with the dogma of divine immutability. He rests satisfied, instead, with the paradoxical formula: "He who is not subject to change in himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*."²⁷⁰ This statement, he admits, "is not intended to offer a positive insight into the compatibility of the dogma of God's immutability and the possibility of becoming in the eternal Logos, nor a positive solution to the duality of this fundamental Christian assertion. It is [merely] a formulation which clearly and seriously maintains both sides of it."²⁷¹

4. Conclusion. Rahner does, then, seem to say that God changes radically in at least some respects. In view of his emphatic endorsement of divine simplicity (cf. 2a. above), then, the first criticism, viz. that if God is simple, then any divine becoming would alter every aspect of God and thus guarantee that the inter-personal relations in the economic Trinity do not correspond to those of the immanent Trinity, seems to exploit a genuine inconsistency in Rahner's thought.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 220; ebd., 212.

²⁷¹ Ibid.; ebd..

III. Bert van der Heijden.

1. Introduction. Bert van der Heijden admits this inconsistency in Rahner's thought insofar as he recognizes that Rahner intends dialectically to ascribe both a radical immutability and a radical mutability to God. In Heijden's view, however, Rahner, so neglects the personal aspect of divine self-communication that he ultimately, if only implicitly, denies any real mutability in God. Heijden argues, that is to say, that if one interprets Rahner's endorsements of divine mutability in terms of his larger theology, they affirm nothing more than God's ability to unite changeable realities to himself: a kind of "mutability" not incompatible with the doctrine of God's absolute unchangeableness.

Heijden himself, incidentally, considers Rahner's putative failure to ascribe thoroughgoing mutability to God a glaring weakness of his thought. In the context of our investigation, however, Heijden's interpretation of Rahner's views on divine self-communication will function as a defense of Rahner against the first criticism.

2. Heijden's argument.

a. Selbstmitteilung vs. Seinsmitteilung. Heijden attributes what he perceives as Rahner's failure fully to thematize the reality of divine becoming principally to a lack of reflection on the personal element in divine self-communication. "The personal as such in Rahner," he writes:

scarcely becomes thematic. He can, therefore,...with a sense of unproblematic self-evidentness convert the revealed datum of the self-communication of God into the thesis, that the divine being [*Sein*] is communicated to the created spirit....[But] is the divine "self" precisely the same as the divine being [*Sein*]? Rahner does not expressly reflect on this problematic. Hence his two theological basic concepts—self-communication and formal causality—remain ambiguous: do they concern a communication of God's being [*Sein*] or the Person (or "self") of God? Are they both the same? If not, then what can the immanent difference between the divine being [*Sein*] and the divine "self" be?²⁷²

²⁷² Karl Rahner: *Darstellung und Kritik seiner Grundpositionen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973), 12.

This ambiguity, this failure of Rahner's to "distinguish expressly between being-self and being-being [*Selbstsein und Sein-Sein*],"²⁷³ leads him, in Heijden's view, to commit fundamental errors when treating each of what Heijden describes as the three *Hauptakzenten* of Rahner's theology: "the identity of being and being's-presence-to-itself, the struggle against monophysitism, and the struggle against tritheism."²⁷⁴ The errors Heijden detects, which we discuss in inverse order, constitute, in turn, the proximate causes of what Heijden regards as Rahner's implicit, but decisive, denial of any real mutability in God.

b. Der Kampf gegen Tritheismus. In the third *Hauptakzent* of Rahner's theology, his in itself justified struggle against the obvious error of tritheism, Rahner goes to what Heijden regards as the unjustified extreme of claiming that "there can be no inner-Trinitarian relations which are 'personal' in what is today the normal sense of that term."²⁷⁵ As Heijden explains, in Rahner's view, "the Logos does not differentiate himself from the Father through a personal, I-Thou relation. That is to say, he is a...relative mode of subsistence that has the fullness of being's-presence-to-itself."²⁷⁶ This implies, Heijden concludes, that "one can make no [real] differentiation between Logos and divinity:"²⁷⁷ i.e. that person and nature do not really differ in God. By identifying the divine persons as relations, of course, Rahner intends, in Heijden's view, only to combat tritheism. According to Heijden, however, by affirming the strictly relative character of the divine persons and, therefore, implying the real, though not quidditative, identity of the Logos and the divine essence, Rahner indirectly implies the impossibility of real change in God.

For, as Heijden notes, correctly, "mutability cannot be in God if he is understood...as essence or nature. That would mean the destruction of metaphysics and the theological truth of the fulfilled perfection of God."²⁷⁸ Rahner's decision to posit a merely relative distinction between the divine persons thus constitutes, in Heijden's view, an implicit endorsement of the doctrine of absolute divine immutability.

²⁷³ Ibid., 124.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 410.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 409.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 405.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 411.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 381.

c. Der Kampf gegen Monophysitismus. In the second *Hauptakzent* of his theology, i.e. the “struggle against monophysitism,” Rahner, likewise, according to Heijden, carries an in itself legitimate concern to unwarrantable extremes. Reacting against what he perceives as monophysitic tendencies within conventional theology, Rahner characterizes Christ's human nature, in Heijden's words, as “a human person, when one understands ‘person’ in the sense normal today, namely as a conscious subject as such.”²⁷⁹ Heijden, moreover, considers such a stance perfectly justified on the basis of both “Christological dogma”²⁸⁰ and “the Gospel image of Christ [*die evangelische Christusgestalt*].”²⁸¹

Heijden objects, however, when Rahner ascribes to this human subject autonomy even over against the divine Logos. For, in that case, Heijden reasons, one could not truthfully assert that “the person—‘in the modern sense’—of Jesus is the Logos;”²⁸² and, in that case, the flesh of Christ which others see and touch would constitute not the expressive symbol of the Logos, but the expressive symbol of a mere human subject. If Rahner correctly ascribed autonomy over against the Logos to Christ's humanity, Heijden explains, logic would dictate that: “when Jesus expresses himself, he speaks out his being-present-to-himself: i.e. the same human being that we also have.”²⁸³

The presence of such a mere, human subject in the world does not establish the radically supernatural, personal relationship which, in Heijden's view, can alone bring about salvation. In order to attain to truly supernatural communion with God, Heijden believes, human beings need, rather, “a relation of God to us that corresponds in a special measure to our mode of being.”²⁸⁴ “The basic correspondence,” Heijden elaborates, “consists herein, that divine love also acquires categoriality as its self-expression and self-communication, as its personal, real symbol, in a similar way as we exist and encounter one another through categoriality.”²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 402.

²⁸⁰ Ibid..

²⁸¹ Ibid..

²⁸² Ibid., 411.

²⁸³ Ibid., 410.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 382.

²⁸⁵ Ibid..

The Logos, as Rahner understands it, cannot assume categoriality in this way, according to Heijden, because it does not possess itself as a subject distinct from the divine essence and, therefore, capable of independent action. Instead, it constitutes a *Subsistenzweise*, a mode of subsistence of the divine essence which as such partakes of its perfections, including immutability. The Logos, as Rahner understands it, can thus serve at most, in Heijden's view, as "a mere *suppositum* of an autonomous human nature."²⁸⁶

In his Christology as in his doctrine of the Trinity, then, Rahner, as Heijden interprets him, identifies essence and person in God in such a way as implicitly to deny that the divine persons can change in the ways that Heijden thinks essential to any genuinely supernatural communion between God and human beings; and, as we have seen, Rahner thus identifies essence and person in God, at least according to Heijden, in order sharply to distinguish his own positions from viewpoints he considers monophysitic or tritheistic.

d. Sein = Beisichsein. In Heijden's view, nonetheless, Rahner possesses in the first *Hauptakzent* of his theology a more basic reason for identifying essence and person in God, one not tinged, like the others, by specifically polemical motives. Rahner believes, on philosophical grounds, that *Sein* is *Beisichsein*: that being is being's-presence-to-itself. If *Sein* and *Beisichsein*, at least in God, are strictly identical, then the God who possesses only one *Sein* can possess only one *Beisichsein*, or personality in the Cartesian sense, so that his *Sein* and his personality, likewise, must be strictly identical.

Heijden, therefore, in explicating what he considers the Rahnerian idea of grace as a new relation to the *Deus unus*, writes, "This conception corresponds to Rahner's identification of *Sein* and *Beisichsein*: a divine *Sein*, also a divine *Beisichsein* = a divine self or person."²⁸⁷ Likewise, Heijden explains, in Rahner's view, "the personal [in the Cartesian sense] is in God an *essentiale*, not something that differentiates the persons. For *Sein* is *Beisichsein* and *Beisichsein* is *Sein*."²⁸⁸

The first *Hauptakzent* of Rahner's theology, the identity of *Sein* and *Beisichsein*, thus renders unthinkable any real distinction between self and being in God. On this

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 411.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 409.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 403.

presupposition, "self-communication, love, personal relation,"²⁸⁹ etc., the sort of things Heijden considers indispensable to a higher, more personal relation to God than that given with creation, become "identical with the metaphysically immutable and absolute essence of God."²⁹⁰ Heijden concludes, therefore, that Rahner effectively denies the possibility of God's so exteriorizing himself as actually to change in a finite, material other; and he interprets Rahner's formula, "He who is not subject to change in himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*,"²⁹¹ accordingly.

e. Rahner's immutability formula. "The formula," he writes:

is situated in the background of the conception of man as being-present-to-oneself in being-present-to-another. Man is as "he himself" transcendence, openness to the fullness of being, remaining "I." He exists thus, however, only in "another," i.e. in the lower degree of being that belongs to him: in his material mode of being and in the formal principle of *materia prima*.... This fact is transferred to God. Also God has the "other from himself:" the immanent Logos and the sub-divine that is assumed in the Incarnation. This is God's own. Insofar as it changes, it unites God to a becoming. He "himself," however, does not change. For God himself is—in contrast to ourself—the already fulfilled and, consequently, unchangeable being.²⁹²

Heijden does not, it is important to note, believe that Rahner interprets his own formula in this way. He understands Rahner to mean, rather, that "the Incarnation is before all else the becoming of God"²⁹³ and quotes Rahner to the effect that the Incarnation constitutes "*die Selbstentäußerung, das Werden, die Kenosis und Genesis Gottes selbst*"²⁹⁴ to substantiate his claim. Heijden explicitly and repeatedly states, moreover, that Rahner's ideas of divine self-communication and the absolute savior presuppose "a relational becoming strictly immanent in God."²⁹⁵ In Heijden's view, however, "Rahner does not reflect thematically on this strictly immanent becoming of God."²⁹⁶

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 412.

²⁹⁰ Ibid..

²⁹¹ *Foundations*, 220; *Grundkurs, SmtWk* xxvi, 219.

²⁹² *Karl Rahner*, 380.

²⁹³ Ibid., 373.

²⁹⁴ "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 148 as quoted in *Karl Rahner*, 373. We reproduce the quote exactly as it appears in Heijden's text. Cf. "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 114.

²⁹⁵ *Karl Rahner*, 382.

²⁹⁶ Ibid..

Likewise, Heijden recognizes that Rahner considers his immutability formula “an ontological ultimate,” i.e. a paradox which does not admit of further clarification. He holds, nevertheless, that this belief of Rahner’s manifests Rahner’s failure adequately to reflect on the meaning of the term “self” in his formula. “If the formula, ‘God himself changes in another without himself changing,’” Heijden writes, “is not supposed to be a contradiction, ‘self’ cannot mean precisely the same thing both times. The unreflected ambiguity of this word of Rahner’s appears here very plainly. For this reason he can believe, with this formula, ‘to have reached an ontological ultimate.’”²⁹⁷

Heijden seeks to dispel this mistaken belief by eliminating all “unreflected ambiguity” in Rahner’s terms. “Himself/self [*sich/Selbst*] in this formula,” he writes “is understood on the one side as absolute being and on the other side as the self of man differentiated from absolute being.”²⁹⁸ This twofold meaning of “self” notwithstanding, Heijden argues, the personal relation of God to human beings which Rahner unsuccessfully attempts to describe through his immutability formula does, when properly understood, require some becoming on the part of God. Nonetheless, Heijden writes, Rahner’s “attention goes immediately to the acquisition of a sub-divine being of which, then, it must naturally be said: God does not become a sub-divine being, but remains transcendent being [*Sein*].”²⁹⁹ In a variation of what constitutes a virtual refrain throughout Heijden’s work, he writes that in Rahner’s theology, “the personal determination of God, to which the acquisition of determined categoriality corresponds and that really adds to what we understand as the essence of God, is neither in its concrete meaningfulness nor in its distinction from this essence thematically reflected.”³⁰⁰ Heijden believes, in other words, that Rahner does not delve sufficiently deeply into his own thought and words and that, if he did, he would recognize the necessity, according to his own principles, of unambiguously ascribing mutability to the “self” of God.

3. *Response.* In response to all of this, one can truthfully say, first, that Heijden unquestionably launches the lengthiest and most sophisticated argument ever presented for the view that Rahner denies that God changes in the Incarnation. One

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 380-1.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 381.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 382.

³⁰⁰ Ibid..

can also truthfully say, however, that it is astonishing that someone with the extensive knowledge of Rahner's corpus that Heijden evidently possesses would defend such a thesis. One may shrink from speaking, with Klaus Fischer, of "citations ripped out of context and abused by the blade of definite prejudice"³⁰¹ in Heijden's work. Nevertheless, Heijden seems inaccurately to portray Rahner's thought at least from the perspective of the history of ideas.

Heijden's purpose, however, seems to consist not so much in accurately recounting Rahner's claims as in eliciting from Rahner's ideas unspoken presuppositions and consequences and evaluating them from his own radically personalist perspective. Heijden's interpretation of Rahner's theology, in fact, resembles in this respect Rahner's own work on the gnoseology of Aquinas in which Rahner attempts to "relive the philosophical event...in Thomas"³⁰² without paying unnecessary attention to historical details.

a. Selbstmitteilung vs. Seinsmitteilung. In any event, it seems quite possible to exculpate Rahner at least partially from each of the charges Heijden levels at him. Heijden's first and principal charge, viz. that Rahner does not thematize the distinction between "self" and "being" in God, for instance, seems palpably false. In his essay, "Theos in the New Testament," for instance, Rahner writes that "God is never appealed to in the New Testament as simply Being, his entitative infinity is never mentioned. It is not so much to the Absolute and Necessary—and thus easily impersonal and abstract—that the New Testament turns its gaze...; its eyes are upon the *personal* God in the *concreteness* of his free activity."³⁰³ One reads in the same essay, likewise, that "love is not the emanation of a nature but the free bestowal of a person."³⁰⁴ These are not, to say the least, the words of one for whom "*Selbst=Seinsmitteilung*."³⁰⁵

Heijden may be correct, of course, in his judgment that, in Rahner's thought, "the difference between a natural relation to the creative *ipsum esse* and the self-

³⁰¹ Klaus Fischer, "Kritik der 'Grundpositionen'? Kritische Anmerkungen zu B. van der Heijdens Buch über Karl Rahner," *ZKT* 99 (1977), 74-89 at 88.

³⁰² *SW*, li; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 13.

³⁰³ *TI* i, 114; "Theos im Neuen Testament," *SmtWk* iv, 375.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 123; *ebd.*, 383.

³⁰⁵ Heijden, *Karl Rahner*, 384.

communication of God is not thematized.”³⁰⁶ This seems to be the case, however, not because Rahner allows for no genuine self-communication at all, but, rather, because divine self-communication so permeates the universe, in Rahner’s view, that one cannot adequately distinguish, on the basis of experience, between the natural and the supernatural: i.e. between aspects of life which reflect the relations that must obtain between creatures of a particular sort and God and aspects of life owing particularly to God’s free, but universally effective, will to communicate himself to his creation. Rahner finds himself unable to distinguish unambiguously between nature and supernature, then, not because he systematically reduces the supernatural to the natural, but because he considers the supernatural so all-encompassing that he shrinks from attributing any aspect of reality to nature alone. Rahner does not reduce God’s self to his being, therefore, either in God’s interior life or in his self-communication *ad extra*; if anything, he so emphasizes the supernatural, personal aspect of God that it overshadows almost completely God’s natural and necessary being.

b. Persons and essence. Heijden’s second charge, viz. that Rahner, by characterizing the divine persons as relations of opposition, identifies them with the divine essence in such a way that they share its immutability, would “convict” Rahner of denying the divine persons’ mutability if, like Heijden, Rahner unambiguously ascribed immutability to the divine essence. Rahner, however, seems nowhere, at least in his mature works, explicitly to affirm the divine essence’s immutability without also qualifying this immutability dialectically. The very idea that God could consist in a necessarily changeless essence really, and not merely rationally, distinct from three radically mutable persons, moreover, seems highly questionable. If the persons lacked any of the perfections of the divine essence, for instance, how could they qualify as fully divine? If the divine essence did not constitute an at least incompletely subsistent,³⁰⁷ individual nature,³⁰⁸ but rather a non-

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 128.

³⁰⁷ The divine essence is incompletely subsistent in that it possesses existence, individuality, and the capacity for action, sc. three of the four notes of subsistence, and yet lacks the fourth, viz. incommunicability to multiple supposita. We derive these criteria from Charles René Billuart, *Cursus Theologiae: Tomus II: De Trinitate: De Angelis: De Opere Sex Dierum et Pars Prima de Incarnatione* (Paris: LeCoffre, 1878), 101b.

³⁰⁸ John of Damascus distinguishes between three senses of the term “nature:” the purely intentional, universal nature that does not inform any individual; the universal nature that informs every individual

subsisting οὐσία δεύτερα instantiated by three, distinct individuals, how could one intelligibly speak of only one God?

Rahner avoids such imposing difficulties of which Heijden seems scarcely aware, by positing a rational, but not a real distinction between the divine persons and the divine essence. This does not mean, as we have already noted, that for Rahner, *Selbst=Seinsmitteilung*. It implies, rather, that, just as grace pre-supposes nature, so, in Rahner's view, communication of the divine self (or selves?)³⁰⁹ presupposes communication of the divine being. The objective identity of the divine essence with the divine persons, in any event, does not entail, according to Rahner, those persons' absolute immutability.

c. Autonomy of Christ's humanity. Heijden's third charge, viz. that Rahner, by ascribing radical autonomy to the humanity of Jesus, logically precludes his functioning as the self-expression of the Logos, seems justifiable only if one dismisses, or misinterprets, Rahner's repeated statements to the effect that "autonomy...does not decrease, but increases in direct proportion to dependence on God."³¹⁰ Rahner emphatically denies that:

God's grace and mastery and the...exercise of freedom are realities encroaching upon one another—in the sense, for instance, of a Pelagian synergism—as if they were realities of which the one could assert itself or grow only at the expense of the other. The divine freedom and mastery [rather] are

included under its aegis; and the individual nature, i.e. the universal nature as determined by individuating features. In his words:

Nature is either understood in bare thought (for in the same it does not subsist); or commonly in all hypostases of the same species uniting them, and [in this case] it is said to be considered in the species; or entirely the same, having received accidents in addition, in a single hypostasis, and [in this case] it is said to be nature considered in an individual (*Expositio Fidei* 55 in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* 2 [Bonifatius Kotter, ed.; PTS 12; Berlin and New York: Gruyter, 1973], 131).

We owe this reference to Richard Cross, "Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus," *Medieval Studies* 62 (2000), 69-124 at 81. Cf. his discussion of the idea of individual nature in *ibid.*, 74-86.

³⁰⁹ Elmar Salmann correctly observes that the identity of the "Selbst" in "*Selbstmitteilung*," as Rahner employs the term, seems, at times at least, quite ambiguous. (*Neuzeit und Offenbarung: Studien zur trinitarischen Analogik des Christentums* [StAns 94; Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1986], 38). "What means now *Selbstmitteilung*?" Salmann asks. "Which self communicates what? Does God communicate—God, hence his nature, his knowledge and will? Or the Father (who in no case can communicate his fatherhood) his loving knowledge in the form of the Logos and Pneuma?"

³¹⁰ *Foundations*, 79; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 81.

experienced from the outset as the reason for the possibility of the creature's...freedom, so that both grow in equal and not in inverse proportion.³¹¹

Given this presupposition, one cannot reasonably claim that the Logos could exteriorize itself in a human nature only if it subjected that nature to total control. One could object, of course, that the idea of dependence and autonomy growing in equal, and not inverse, proportions, seems self-contradictory. Yet Rahner, here as elsewhere, thinks that he can justify such "dialectical" statements without establishing their harmony with the law of non-contradiction. In resolving the inconsistency between dependence and autonomy in Rahner's Christology in favor of autonomy, then, Heijden seems more to obscure than to clarify Rahner's actual meaning.

d. Unity and distinction in God. Heijden's fourth and final charge, viz. that by equating *Sein* with *Beisichsein*, Rahner implicitly depreciates multiplicity in God seems, like the previous charge, reasonable only if one ignores or misunderstands Rahner's statements concerning the dialectical relationship between unity and distinction in and with God. Rahner explicitly states that "here [i.e. in 'being *as* such, and hence *as* one'] unity and distinction are correlatives which increase in like proportions, not in inverse proportions which would reduce each to be contradictory and exclusive of the other."³¹²

As we shall see in section IV.3.d.i, moreover, the idea of being as being's-presence-to-itself requires, in the view of the later Rahner, a certain plurality intrinsic to every being and especially to God. In order to attain presence-to-itself, every being, to the degree that it possesses being, must, according to Rahner's theory, produce an internal other simultaneously identical with and distinct from itself so that one can intelligibly describe the being as present to itself. In Rahner's view, then, the identity of *Sein* and *Beisichsein*, so far from eradicating the multiplicity in God affirmed by the doctrine of the Trinity, actually requires such multiplicity as an indispensable prerequisite of God's presence to himself.

³¹¹ "Guilt—Responsibility—Punishment," *TI* vi, 197-217 at 200; "Schuld—Verantwortung—Strafe," *SzTh* vi, 238-61 at 242.

³¹² "Symbol," *TI* iv, 228; "Symbols," *SmtWk* xviii, 429-30.

As before, Heijden could point out that the idea of unity and distinction between two realities in the same respect increasing in direct proportion seems flatly self-contradictory; and he would, perhaps, be abundantly justified in so doing. He is not justified, however, in ignoring, or explaining away, one of two seemingly incompatible positions Rahner holds and then criticizing Rahner as if he unequivocally affirmed one of the two contradictory positions and just as unequivocally rejected the other. Rahner, in any event, rejects the idea that one can truthfully posit a real distinction between an immutable essence and one or more mutable selves in God; he does not rule out, in fact, the possibility that every aspect of God is just as immutable and/or mutable as every other. Rahner, therefore, rejects the premise on which Heijden's fourth objection is based: viz. that God's essence is immutable to such an extent that, if God changes, he must possess a "self" in some way extrinsic to that essence.

4. *Conclusion.* Heijden succeeds, then, in proving neither: a) that Rahner denies, implicitly or explicitly, the mutability of the Logos in the Incarnation; nor b) that Rahner's formula, "He who is not subject to change in himself can *himself* be subject to change *in something else*,"³¹³ coheres with an unqualified doctrine of divine immutability. His arguments, though strikingly original and obviously grounded in thorough research, thus seem insufficient to neutralize our first criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*.

³¹³ *Foundations*, 220; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 212.

IV. Conciliar Authority and the Consistency of Rahner's Views

1. *Introduction.* A counterargument to the first criticism, it seems, might be drawn from Rahner's confidence in the teaching authority of ecumenical councils in union with the Pope. One might argue, that is to say: a) that Rahner considers the teachings of such councils, when approved by the Pope and when intended as definitive statements of faith, infallibly true; b) that such councils, in union with the Pope, have definitively affirmed the doctrine of divine immutability, the reality of sanctifying grace, the Incarnation of the Logos, and Christ's "absolute saviorhood"; c) that Rahner demonstrates the integrality of divine self-communication, in his sense of that term, to sanctifying grace and/or the Incarnation and/or Christ's "absolute saviorhood"; d) that the charism of infallibility precludes the possibility of self-contradiction in definitive teaching; e) that Rahner's understanding of divine self-communication and the doctrine of divine immutability, therefore, must be compatible; and f) that any criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* that presupposes the incompatibility of divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it with divine immutability, as our first criticism does, must, consequently, be invalid.

In the context of a strictly immanent critique, such an argument seems practically invincible. For one cannot reasonably call Rahner's belief in the infallibility of definitive, conciliar teaching definitively authorized by the Pope into question. In a 1976 lexicon article on "Unfehlbarkeit,"³¹⁴ for instance, Rahner, after identifying "an ecumenical council together with the Pope"³¹⁵ as one of the "bearers of infallibility,"³¹⁶ writes:

The historicity of a dogma does not mean...that the infallibility of the church must be interpreted thus, as: God guarantees an eschatological perseverance of the church in the truth, while dogmas of the magisterium or statements of Scripture could always also be erroneous. The perseverance in the truth realizes itself *also* in true propositions; every ultimate *Grundentscheidung* of man, which (through the grace of God) establishes him in the truth, expresses itself always and necessarily in true propositions. The church as a tangible substance [*Größe*] would not persevere in the truth if the objectivations of its

³¹⁴ *KThW*¹⁰, 425-7.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 425.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*.

perseverance in the truth, viz. its actual propositions of faith as the concrete form of its perseverance in the truth, were erroneous.³¹⁷

It seems, however, that one can reasonably question the cogency of Rahner's arguments for the integrality of divine self-communication as he understands it to sanctifying grace, the Incarnation, and Christ's status as "absolute savior." In the following, accordingly, we intend to ask whether, and in what degree, Rahner actually demonstrates that the doctrines of sanctifying grace, the Incarnation, and Christ's absolute saviorhood presuppose or imply the reality of divine self-communication in his sense of the term. We intend, in other words, to test the soundness of premise c) in the above counterargument to our first criticism: the only premise of this counterargument, in our view, that admits of challenge within the context of a strictly immanent critique.

2. Sanctifying grace.

a. Introduction. Few Christians deny, of course, that God communicates himself to at least some human beings by a certain uncreated grace insofar as he sanctifies and dwells within the souls of the justified.³¹⁸ In this section, accordingly, the issue in dispute is not whether sanctifying grace necessarily involves divine self-communication and uncreated grace; it is, rather, whether these realities constitute "the act whereby God goes out of himself into 'the other' in such a way that he

³¹⁷ Ibid., 426-7.

³¹⁸ "Grace," writes Adolphe Tanquerey, "is said to uncreated or created: (a) *uncreated* grace is God himself communicating himself to the intellectual creature; (b) *created* grace is the gratuitous gift distinct from God and, as it were, the effect of divine love" (*Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae Specialis* 2 [Paris: Desclée, 1914¹⁴], §8, p. 24. Uncreated and created grace, Tanquerey explains, constitute the two elements of habitual grace, which, "as it is *uncreated* grace, is a special union of God with the soul in which he dwells, and, insofar as it is *created* grace, is a supernatural quality, permanently and intrinsically inhering in the soul through which we are made partakers of the divine nature" (ibid., §11, p. 25).

Protestants, incidentally, do not deny that God infuses created grace into the regenerate. The Synod of Dordt specifically condemns those "who teach...that in the true conversion of man no new qualities, powers or gifts can be infused by God into the will....For thereby they contradict the Holy Scriptures, which declare that God infuses new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of his love into our hearts" (Canons of Dordt, Chapter III-IV, Rejection of Errors, paragraph 6 in *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* [Philip Schaff, ed. and trans.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877], 569-70).

bestows himself upon the other by becoming the other.”³¹⁹ The issue in dispute, in other words, is whether these realities ought to be conceived of in Rahnerian terms. In order to resolve this issue, we intend, for the remainder of this section: first, to outline Rahner's arguments for the identity of the uncreated aspect of sanctifying grace with divine self-communication in his distinctive sense of that word; and, second, to respond to those arguments by evaluating their adequacy for this purpose

b. Rahner's arguments. In order to establish that sanctifying grace in its uncreated aspect consists in divine self-communication as he understands it, Rahner proposes two, basic arguments: one from the believer's possession of the Holy Spirit as the “earnest of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 1:22 and 5:5)³²⁰ and another from the priority of uncreated to created grace.

i. Uncreated grace as presupposition of the beatific vision.

α. Introduction. In the first, Rahner contends that, because “the possession of the Pneuma (and thus primarily uncreated grace) is conceived of in Scripture as the homogeneous germ and commencement of the beatific vision,...we have the right to apply to uncreated grace in this life the concepts of formal ontology relating to the possession of God in the *visio beatifica*.”³²¹ In other words, if uncreated grace, the possession of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the earnest of the life of glory, whose principal blessing is the beatific vision, then this uncreated grace must constitute, in some sense, a presupposition of that vision. In such a case, Rahner reasons, one could determine something of the essence of uncreated grace by determining the ontological presuppositions of the beatific vision. Indeed, he seems to consider such

³¹⁹ “Mystery,” *TI* iv, 68; “Geheimnis,” *SzTh* iv, 93.

³²⁰ The NRSV's rendering of ἄρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν as “pledge of our inheritance” suggests that Paul means in Eph 1:14 to identify the Holy Spirit as he dwells in the righteous on earth as a temporary and inferior substitute for the joys of heaven of which he constitutes the pledge. In extra-Biblical usage, however, the term ἄρραβὼν almost always signifies “earnest money...[i.e.] a real part of the object of contract, given in advance both to insure final payment and also to contribute to it” (Barnabas Ahern, “The Indwelling Spirit, Pledge of Our Inheritance (Eph 1:14),” *CBQ* 9 [1947], 179-89). We think it appropriate, therefore, to translate ἄρραβὼν as “earnest” rather than “pledge.”

³²¹ “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace” [“Uncreated”], *TI* i, 319-46 at 334; “Zur scholastischen Begrifflichkeit der ungeschaffenen Gnade” [“Ungeschaffene”], *SzTh* i, 347-76 at 362.

delving into the presuppositions of the beatific vision the only viable method for determining the essence of uncreated grace. "Uncreated grace," he writes, "is only to be determined in terms of the *visio*."³²²

Rahner reasons, in other words: a) that the uncreated grace bestowed on the blessed constitutes an ontological presupposition of the beatific vision; b) that, according to the testimony of Scripture, the uncreated grace in which God communicates himself to the wayfarer³²³ is of the same kind as that in which he communicates himself to the blessed; and c) that whatever characterizes the uncreated grace of the blessed insofar as it constitutes a presupposition of the beatific vision must, therefore, characterize equally the uncreated grace received already by the wayfarer. Acting on these assumptions, then, Rahner seeks to prove that God must communicate himself to the blessed in the way that Rahner envisions in order to endow them with the beatific vision; and that God, therefore, already communicates himself in the radical, Rahnerian sense of that term to wayfarers. To this end, specifically, Rahner employs two arguments: one from the nature of knowledge itself and another from the absolute immediacy of the beatific vision.

β. Being and knowing. In the first, Rahner contends that, because "knowing, in its first and original sense, is the self-presence of being,...something is known to the extent that it becomes in its being identical with the knowing subject."³²⁴ One cannot know God, therefore, according to Rahner, unless one becomes, in some measure, identical with him. Hence, in Rahner's view, human beings cannot know God in the beatific vision or even in this life unless "God goes out of himself into 'the other' in such a way that he bestows himself upon the other by becoming the other;"³²⁵ unless, that is to say, God communicates himself in the Rahnerian sense of the term. Rahner attempts to prove this argument's fundamental premise, viz. that "being and knowing are the same,"³²⁶ by the following rationale.

³²² Ibid., 335; ebd., 363.

³²³ We employ the term "wayfarer" in this work in the sense of *viator*: sc. as a name for regenerate persons who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision.

³²⁴ *HW*, 32-3; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 68.

³²⁵ "Mystery," *TI* iv, 68; "Geheimnis," *SzTh* iv, 93.

³²⁶ *SW*, 69; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 62.

1. Human beings are evidently capable of asking "the question: what is the being of beings?"³²⁷
2. "We cannot inquire about something absolutely unknown."³²⁸
3. "Thus some kind of knowing is asserted and expressed when we inquire about the meaning of being."³²⁹
4. Yet "the question about being as such inquires about everything."³³⁰
5. The human capacity to ask the question of being thus implies that "all being is basically knowable or intelligible"³³¹ to human beings.
6. "This intrinsic ordination of every being to possible knowledge is an *a priori* and necessary statement."³³²
7. Now, "an essential relation of correlativity between two states of affairs must...be founded in an original unity of both of them."³³³
8. "Therefore, being and knowing are related to each other, because originally, in their ground, they are the same reality."³³⁴
9. "This does not imply anything less than that being as such, to the extent that it is being, is knowing."³³⁵

In this case, Rahner concludes, "knowledge cannot at its ultimate basis consist in a state of having something intentionally 'over against' one as an object; the only way still open to us to conceive of it is as a state...in which the knower in the true sense and the known in the true sense are one and identical in being."³³⁶ If Rahner is correct in so concluding, it seems, something like the beatific vision can, indeed, occur only if God communicates himself to human beings in the Rahnerian sense of those words.

³²⁷ HW, 25; Hörer, *SmtWk* iv, 54.

³²⁸ Ibid., 29; ebd., 60..

³²⁹ Ibid., 28; ebd..

³³⁰ Ibid.; ebd..

³³¹ Ibid., 29; ebd..

³³² Ibid.; ebd., 62.

³³³ Ibid.; ebd..

³³⁴ Ibid.; ebd..

³³⁵ Ibid.; ebd..

³³⁶ "Thomas Aquinas on Truth," *TI* xiii, 29; "Die Wahrheit bei Thomas von Aquin," *SmtWk* ii, 315.

γ. *God as impressed species.* In his second argument for the indispensability of divine self-communication, as he understands it, to the beatific vision, Rahner asserts that God, in the beatific vision, does not manifest himself to the blessed through a created, impressed species, but rather absolutely immediately, “face to face.” Rahner, upon the authority of Aquinas, moreover, claims that in order to compensate for the lack of a created, impressed species, ordinarily a *sine qua non* of human knowledge, “God’s essence itself takes the place of the *species (impressa)* in the created mind.”³³⁷

Rahner admits, of course, that God’s transcendence prevents him from informing the human intellect in precisely the same way that a created, impressed species, in other instances, informs it. Yet he also maintains that God, his transcendence notwithstanding, exercises “an active formal causality (*eine formale Wirkursächlichkeit*)”³³⁸ on the minds of the blessed.

Rahner concedes, again, that, on account of the uniquely transcendent nature of God, one could reasonably refer to this causality as merely “*quasi-formal*.”³³⁹ Yet he insists:

all this ‘quasi’ implies is that this ‘forma’, in spite of its formal causality, which must be taken really seriously, abides in its absolute transcendence (inviolateness, ‘freedom’). But it does *not* imply that the statement, ‘In the beatific vision God occupies the place of a *species* in virtue of a formal causality’, is a mode of speech lacking all binding force; on the contrary, it is the *quasi* which must be prefixed to every application to God of a category in itself terrestrial.³⁴⁰

Rahner again attempts to moderate his position, however, by associating the quasi-formal causality which he ascribes to God with the scholastic idea of an “*actus terminans*,”³⁴¹ which he correctly, although only partially, defines as “that which in itself is and remains a perfect reality in spite of and prior to the act of determination.”³⁴²

³³⁷ “Uncreated,” *TI* I, 327; “Ungeschaffene,” *SzTh* i, 355.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*; 330; *ebd.*, 358.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 358-9.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 331, n.1; *ebd.*, 359, Anm. 1.

³⁴² *Ibid.*; *ebd.*.

For an *actus terminans*, or terminative cause, at least as commonly understood, influences a reality distinct from itself only in the sense that a point influences a line; i.e. it serves only as an object or a limit, and no more.³⁴³ Louis Billot does not err in the slightest degree, therefore, when he explains that God, *qua* terminative cause of the beatific vision, “informs not physically, but merely intentionally.”³⁴⁴

Rahner, however, declares that if Billot means “that God is in fact an ‘intentional’ *known object*, the whole explanation is false, for it is a question here precisely of an ontological (hence ‘physical’) *presupposition* of knowledge.”³⁴⁵ Rahner cannot, therefore, mean merely to assert that God must exert a terminative causality in order to bestow the beatific vision upon the souls of the blessed. Rahner states quite clearly, rather, that he regards a “*communication* of the divine being taking place *by way of formal causality* to the created spirit...[as an] *ontological presupposition* of the *visio*.”³⁴⁶

“The reality of the mind in the beatific vision,” he writes, “so far as such a reality in itself is due to a *species* as the means of knowledge, is the very Being of God.”³⁴⁷ The beatific vision, then, cannot occur, in Rahner's view, without “the one self-communication of God to the creature, which is essentially the act whereby God goes out of himself into ‘the other’ in such a way that he bestows himself upon the other by becoming the other.”³⁴⁸

On the basis of this argument and the former, then, Rahner concludes that one cannot deny the reality of divine self-communication as he conceives of it without also implicitly denying that the saints departed enjoy an immediate and beatifying vision of God: something which few Western Christians would wish to do.

δ. *Conclusion.* In his first argument for the necessity of divine self-communication in the distinctively Rahnerian sense of that term to uncreated grace, then, Rahner argues: a) that the uncreated grace of the blessed constitutes an ontological presupposition of the beatific vision; b) that the uncreated grace of the

³⁴³ Cf. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa* (Bede Rose, tr.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1950), 39-42.

³⁴⁴ *De Deo Uno et Trino: Commentarius in Prima Parte S. Thomae* (Prati: Giachetti, 1910⁵), 146.

³⁴⁵ “Uncreated,” *TI* i, 331, n. 1; “Ungeschaffene,” *SzTh* i, 359, Anm. 1.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 335; *ebd.*, 363.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 332; *ebd.*, 360.

³⁴⁸ “Mystery,” *TI* iv, 68; “Geheimnis,” *SzTh* iv, 93.

wayfarer, according to Scripture, differs in no essential respect from that of the blessed; c) that whatever must be true the uncreated grace of the blessed in order for it to function as an ontological presupposition of the beatific vision must, therefore, be equally true of the uncreated grace of the wayfarer; d) that the identity of being and knowing and the absolute immediacy of the beatific vision imply that the uncreated grace of the blessed must consist in divine self-communication as Rahner understands it; and e) that the uncreated grace of the wayfarer as well, consequently, must consist in divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense.

ii. The priority of uncreated over created grace.

α. Introduction. In his second argument to the effect that a proper understanding of grace entails a belief in divine self-communication as he conceives of it, Rahner contends that if one denies that uncreated grace consists fundamentally in such divine self-communication, one thereby implicitly denies the ultimate priority of uncreated to created grace. Such a denial, Rahner contends, places one in conflict with the plain sense of Scripture and the overwhelming consensus of the Fathers.

"For St. Paul," Rahner observes, correctly, "man's inner sanctification is first and foremost a communication of the personal Spirit of God, that is to say, in scholastic terms, a *donum increatum*; and he sees every created grace, every way of being πνευματικός, as a consequence and manifestation of the possession of this uncreated grace."³⁴⁹ Likewise, Rahner observes, again correctly, "the Fathers (especially the Greek Fathers) see the created gifts of grace as a consequence of God's substantial communication to justified men."³⁵⁰

β. The "scholastic" view of uncreated grace. The scholastic theories of the relation between created and uncreated grace, however, in Rahner's view at least, teach precisely the opposite. "However diverse they may be among themselves," he writes, "all the scholastic theories...see God's indwelling and his conjunction with the justified man as based exclusively upon created grace."³⁵¹ As he summarizes the

³⁴⁹ "Uncreated," *TI* i, 322; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 349-50.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 350-1.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 324; *ebd.*, 352.

scholastic viewpoint, "In virtue of the fact [*dadurch*] that created grace is imparted to the soul God imparts himself to it and dwells in it."³⁵²

Rahner, moreover, thinks this departure from Scriptural and traditional teaching entirely understandable, albeit regrettable. From the perspective of the scholastic theologians he criticizes, Rahner explains, the "new *relation* of God to man"³⁵³ brought about by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit "can only be conceived of as founded upon an absolute entitative modification of man himself."³⁵⁴ For God cannot change, and one cannot speak of a new relation between two terms at all if neither changes in any way.

Yet, in Rahner's view, such an understanding of human salvation fails satisfactorily to account for the presence of uncreated grace in human beings, and that in two respects. First, Rahner holds, it manifestly reduces uncreated grace to "a function [*eine abhängige Funktion*] of created grace"³⁵⁵ and thus opposes the view of Scripture and the Fathers. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, Rahner contends that it, implicitly and unintentionally, denies that sanctifying grace effects a new relationship with God at all. For, according to Rahner:

an accidental modification, from without, of the creature's being in itself and with regard to itself,...could not be the basis for a fundamentally and essentially new 'relationship' of God to the creature....The only fresh feature such an accidental absolute modification of the creature could bring with it is that relation to God which is a constituent [*mitgesetzt ist*] of any creaturely being, namely the transcendental reference of absolute finite being to God as to its cause.³⁵⁶

Recalling his discussion of uncreated grace as the ontological presupposition of the beatific vision, Rahner insists also that "here it is a question precisely of a 'relation' which does not immediately imply an absolute created determination; for otherwise the *species* of the beatific vision would ultimately be yet again a created quality."³⁵⁷

³⁵² Ibid.; ebd..

³⁵³ Ibid.; ebd..

³⁵⁴ Ibid.; ebd..

³⁵⁵ Ibid.; ebd..

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 328-9; ebd., 357.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 329; ebd..

γ. *Rahner's alternative.* In articulating his own perspective, however, Rahner does not wish to claim that uncreated grace does not bestow created grace as its concomitant effect; for, if he claimed such a thing, he too, no less than the scholastics whom he opposes, would render himself unable to "say with St. Paul that we possess our pneumatic being [*Pneumatischsein*] (our 'created sanctifying grace') because we have the personal Pneuma of God."³⁵⁸ In such a case, furthermore, Rahner could also not consistently affirm that divine self-communication stands in a relationship of mutual causality to the created *lumen gloriae*,³⁵⁹ as he himself explicitly states.³⁶⁰

When Rahner asserts that "here it is a question precisely of a 'relation' which does not immediately imply an absolute created determination,"³⁶¹ then, he seems to mean that uncreated grace, although unrealizable apart from created grace, engenders a new relation between a human being with God in a sense in which this created grace does not. In such an event, the new relation would depend directly on uncreated grace as its formal cause and only indirectly on created grace as uncreated grace's necessary complement. In this sense and in this sense only, then, does Rahner mean to assert that the new relation between human beings and God established by uncreated grace "does not immediately imply an absolute created determination."

Rahner does not, therefore, declare the indwelling of the Holy Spirit absolutely and in every respect logically prior to the presence of created grace in the soul.³⁶² He does, however, distinguish sharply between: a) the relation engendered directly by uncreated grace in virtue of which one can reasonably claim that a soul possesses the Holy Spirit; and b) any relation constituted by created grace *simpliciter* or by some uncreated grace bestowed solely for the purpose of imparting created grace. By so distinguishing, Rahner implicitly pronounces every form of merely extrinsic, divine causality insufficient to the task of effecting a divine indwelling in the souls of the just.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 322; ebd., 350.

³⁵⁹ "The *lumen gloriae*," writes Adolphe Tanqueray, "is a supernatural habit that perfects the intellect of the blessed and renders him proximately capable of seeing God intuitively" (*Synopsis* 2, §1014, p. 720).

³⁶⁰ "Uncreated," *TI* i, 333; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 361.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 329; ebd., 357.

³⁶² "The point which we must not lose sight of in this," Rahner writes, "is the unity which exists between uncreated grace considered as *causa quasiformalis* and created grace as the necessary prior condition and at the same time the consequence of the uncreated grace" ("Immanent and Transcendent," *TI* x, 282; "Immanente und transzendente," *SmtWk* xv, 551).

For God, in Rahner's view, cannot through efficient causality or exemplary causality or final causality bestow anything whose value does not depend, in some degree at least, on the value of its created effects. If, as Rahner holds, the uncreated grace that effects divine indwelling must possess some significance irrespective of its created effects, it must, then, consist in some supra-categorical assimilation to God. It must consist, in Rahner's words, in "a taking up into the ground":³⁶³ which is precisely what Rahner intends to signify by the term quasi-formal causality.

δ. Conclusion. Rahner, in sum, concludes in this second argument from the reality of sanctifying grace to the reality of divine self-communication as he understands it that one who does not equate the uncreated grace which effects divine indwelling with quasi-formal causality in Rahner's sense of the term cannot account for the logical priority of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to the possession of created grace. Rahner concludes, in fact, that such a person cannot even explain why the indwelling of the divine persons in the souls of the justified transcends God's general presence of immensity. On the basis of this second argument and the first, that from sanctifying grace's relation to the beatific vision, then, Rahner rests his case for the indispensability of divine self-communication, as he conceives of it, to sanctifying grace.

c. Response.

i. Introduction. If Rahner could actually prove that divine self-communication as he understands it constitutes an essential component of sanctifying grace, it seems, the Rahnerian belief: a) that ecumenical councils teaching in unison with the Pope are infallible when speaking definitively on matters of faith and morals; when combined with the data b) that such councils have "infallibly" affirmed the doctrine of divine immutability and the existence of sanctifying grace; and c) that the charism of infallibility precludes the possibility of self-contradiction in such affirmations; would, indeed, imply that Rahner's understanding of divine self-communication does not ultimately conflict with the dogma of divine immutability. Such a result, as we have seen, would prove our first criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* unsound at least

³⁶³ "Uncreated," *TI* i, 329; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 358.

in the context of a strictly immanent critique. In the following response, therefore, we intend to evaluate not only Rahner's arguments concerning the relation of uncreated grace to the beatific vision and the priority of uncreated to created grace, but also, indirectly, one of the central contentions of the first half of this work.

ii. Uncreated grace as ontological presupposition of the beatific vision.

α. Introduction. In the first of his arguments for the integrality of divine self-communication in his distinctive sense of that term to sanctifying grace, Rahner, as we have seen, reasons: a) that if the uncreated grace possessed by wayfarers differs in no essential respect from that possessed by the blessed; and b) that if the uncreated grace of the blessed must consist in divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense of that term in order for the beatific vision to occur; then c) the uncreated grace of wayfarers as well must consist in divine self-communication according to Rahner's conception of it.

Now, Rahner's first premise, viz. that "grace...is a commencement of the blessed life, homogeneous with the ontological presuppositions of the vision,"³⁶⁴ seems, in the main at least, unexceptionable. For Scripture does incontestably describe the indwelling Holy Spirit as "the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5). In the indwelling divine persons, that is to say, Christians possess no mere *pignus*, distinct from their heavenly reward and inferior to it, but an ἀρραβών of their inheritance, a substantial share in the great recompense to come.

Likewise, it seems evident that grace, uncreated and created, does constitute a prerequisite of the beatific vision. One who beholds God face to face, after all, must not lack that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Regardless of one's views as to whether Rahner fully appreciates the difference between grace and glory, then, one cannot reasonably dispute Rahner's fundamental claim that "grace...is...an inner entitative principle (at least a partial principle) of the vision of God."³⁶⁵ Neither, then, can one reasonably dispute this claim's immediate consequence, viz. that "the inner nature of grace as a whole in this life must allow of

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 326; ebd., 354.

³⁶⁵ "Uncreated," *TI* i, 326; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 354.

being more closely determined in terms of the nature of the ontological presuppositions of the immediate vision of God.”³⁶⁶

It seems, accordingly, that if one can prove divine self-communication, as Rahner conceives of it, indispensable to the beatific vision, then one can also establish the identity of the uncreated grace bestowed on wayfarers with divine self-communication in Rahner's sense of the term. If one cannot establish the former conclusion, however, the connection Rahner perceives between the uncreated grace of wayfarers and that of the blessed will not suffice, of itself, to demonstrate the integrality of divine self-communication, as Rahner understands it, to sanctifying grace. We shall devote the following two subsections, therefore, exclusively to the question of whether Rahner succeeds in demonstrating that (1) the relation between being and knowing as such and (2) the absence of a created species in the beatific vision render divine self-communication, according to Rahner's understanding of it, indispensable to the beatific vision.

β. Being and knowing. As we have already seen, in Rahner's view, the beatific vision presupposes divine self-communication as he conceives of it, because: a) “being is knowing;”³⁶⁷ and b) knowledge can, therefore, occur only to the extent that “the knower in the true sense and the known in the true sense are one and identical in being.”³⁶⁸ We do not intend to contest the logical validity of Rahner's inference. It seems transparently obvious that if “being is knowing,” then knowledge presupposes a substantial union between knower and known.

It is by no means obvious, however, that non-intentional, creaturely being is even relatively identical with creaturely knowing. For, as Aquinas explains:

the action of an angel is not its *esse*, neither is the action of any creature its *esse*. For the genus of action is twofold.... One action is that which passes into something exterior, inflicting passion on it, as to burn and to cut. Another action...is that which does not pass into an exterior thing, but remains in the agent itself: as to sense, to understand, and to will. For through action of this sort nothing extrinsic is changed, but the action is conducted entirely within the agent itself. Of the first action, therefore, it is manifest that it cannot be the very *esse* of the agent. For the *esse* of the agent is indicated to be within the agent itself. Such action, however, is an *effluxus* from the agent into the act. The second action, moreover, has infinity of its own nature, either simply or *secundum quid*. Such

³⁶⁶ Ibid.; ebd..

³⁶⁷ HW, 35; Hörer, *SmtWk* iv, 70.

³⁶⁸ “Thomas Aquinas on Truth,” *TI* xiii, 29; “Die Wahrheit bei Thomas von Aquin,” *SmtWk* ii, 315.

actions have infinity simply as to understand, whose object is the true, and to will, whose object is the good, either of which [object] is convertible [or co-extensive] with being; and thus to know and to understand,...bear relation [*habent se*] to all things; and each also receives its species from its object. To sense, moreover, is infinite *secundum quid*, because it bears relation [*se habet*] to all things sensible, as sight bears relation to all things visible. The *esse* of any creature, however, is limited to one in genus and species [*STh Ia, 54, 2 corp.*].

Admittedly, Rahner rejects a central premise of Thomas' argument: viz. that human beings' membership in a single species precludes the possibility of infinite, human self-transcendence. Rahner maintains, rather, that each human being possesses "an indefinable nature whose limits—'definition'— are the unlimited reference to the infinite fullness of the mystery"³⁶⁹ that is God so that "it would be wrong to define him [the human being], to delimit and put bounds to his possibilities."³⁷⁰ In the context of a strictly immanent critique, therefore, one cannot reasonably censure the view that "being is knowing" simply because it entails a radical openness of human nature to higher levels of reality.

One can plausibly argue, nonetheless, that Rahner's relative identification of created being and knowing conflicts even with his own understanding of human nature to the extent that it implies the possibility of transcendence in reverse: the confusion of the human spirit with the sub-spiritual objects of its knowledge. Rahner holds, after all, that a human being's "spiritual quality and transcendence towards being as such prevents its being 'defined', that is 'delimited' in the same way that sub-human entities can. For these are 'defined' by the fact that it is their essence to be restricted to a certain realm of reality.....It is therefore impossible, for instance, for them to be 'elevated' to a supernatural fulfillment: such an elevation would destroy their being which is essentially limit."³⁷¹

Rahner, admittedly, possesses an answer to this objection in his understanding of human sensibility as the capacity for self-presence in a material other. This understanding, insofar as it pertains to the present question, consists fundamentally in the following three propositions. Rahner's proposes, first, that "the sensible object, insofar as it is outside the soul, projects itself into sensibility (wherefore sensibility itself must be 'outside itself') and in this medium (and only in it) acquires through its

³⁶⁹ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 109; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 141.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110; *ebd.*, 143.

³⁷¹ "Nature and Grace," *TI* iv, 183; "Natur und Gnade," *SzTh* iv, 231.

own operation that intensity of being which implies consciousness;"³⁷² second, that "the intensity of being which makes the self-realization of the sensible object in the medium of sensibility actually sensible must [nonetheless] be bestowed upon it by sensibility itself;"³⁷³ and, third, that "the self-realization of the sensible object must [therefore] be identical with the self-realization of sensibility."³⁷⁴

In other words, Rahner holds that the thesis, "being is knowing,"³⁷⁵ implies "the identity of knowing and the actually known"³⁷⁶ so that "what is actually [as opposed to potentially] knowable is by that very fact actually knowing."³⁷⁷ This result need not imply that sub-spiritual beings possess consciousness in their own right, Rahner argues, for: a) the sensible object acquires an intensity of being that entails consciousness "only in the medium of sensibility, so that in this and not in itself it is actually sentient;"³⁷⁸ and b) this self-realization of the sub-spiritual object derives from the human knower and not the sub-spiritual object itself. Each of these conditions can obtain, Rahner argues if the self-realization of the subhuman object of knowledge in the realm of human sensibility is identical with the self-realization of the same human sensibility.³⁷⁹ "The species, which is the actuality of the object itself, must be produced by the sentient knower himself, because otherwise it would not possess the intensity of being which implies self-reflection; and, on the other hand, the species must be the self-realization of the sensible object itself, because otherwise this would not be intuited in its own self."³⁸⁰

Rahner's theory of sensibility, if it consisted merely in propositions a) and b), would blunt the force of Aquinas' argument from the nature of immanent action to the real distinction of created being and knowing considerably. To his credit, however, Rahner notes that these relatively innocuous claims imply a third, more controversial proposition: viz. that that sensible object and human sensibility must share a single, conscious act in order for sensation to occur. Now, *operare sequitur*

³⁷² *SW*, 94; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 80.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 81.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*.

³⁷⁵ *HW*, 35; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 70.

³⁷⁶ *SW*, 93; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 80.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 94; *ebd.*, 80.

³⁷⁹ In asserting the very possibility of an agent's and a patient's sharing a single act in a material medium, of course, Rahner implicitly rejects the view of transient action sketched by Aquinas in *STh* Ia, 54, 2 corp..

³⁸⁰ *SW*, 92; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 79.

esse; if the sensible object, which in itself is utterly unconscious, truly “acquires through its own operation that intensity of being which implies consciousness”³⁸¹ and, in so doing, shares the self-same actuality with a human being, then it must possess quite a substantial capacity for self-transcendence. If Rahner’s understanding of sensibility were objectively justified, then: 1) Rahner’s claims about the radical distinctness of spiritual and sub-spiritual being would prove false; and 2) our objection that an ontological union of spiritual knower and sub-spiritual known would require a negative transcendence on the part of the spiritual knower would prove invalid as well.

Rahner’s theory of sensibility, then, supplies an answer to our objection concerning negative transcendence, but only at the cost of undermining the sharp distinction between personal and sub-personal being that Rahner draws, to a certain extent at least, throughout his career.³⁸² To the extent, accordingly, that Rahner’s relative identification of created being and knowing requires, for its own vindication, the diminution of a distinction consistently affirmed by Rahner, one can reasonably claim that Rahner’s views on being and knowing conflict with certain of his own presuppositions. Rahner’s metaphysics of knowledge, insofar as it entails that all objects of human perception possess, albeit only under certain conditions and in an analogous sense, the capacity for consciousness, seems, in any event, unjustifiably to narrow the spectrum of beings. Such considerations, however, are only tangentially relevant in the context of an immanent critique.

γ. God as impressed species. Rahner attempts to establish the indispensability of divine self-communication, as he understands it, to the beatific vision, second, by arguing that God must compensate for the absence of a created, impressed species in the beatific vision by quasi-informing the human intellect in a manner analogous to an impressed species’ information of a human being’s possible intellect in ordinary instances of human knowledge.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 94; ebd., 80.

³⁸² Cf., e.g., “Relationship,” *TI* i, 317 (“Verhältnis,” *SzTh* i, 344); “Concupiscentia,” *TI* i, 356, n. 1 (“Konkupiszenz,” *SmtWk* viii, 11, Anm. 11); “Easter,” *TI* iv, 130, n. 10 (“Osterfrömmigkeit,” *SzTh* iv, 169, Anm. 10); “Immanent and Transcendent,” *TI* x, 279 (“Immanente und transzendente,” *SmtWk* xv, 548); and *Trinity*, 89 (“Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 375).

Now, Rahner is correct in observing that no created species informs the human intellect in the beatific vision. For, as Aquinas explains:

Through no created similitude can the essence of God be seen...because the essence of God is his existence itself..., which can be admissible of no created form. No created form whatsoever, therefore, can be a similitude representing the essence of God to the seer....[This is the case also] because the divine essence is an uncircumscribed thing, containing in itself super-eminently whatever can be signified or understood by a created intellect....In no way through any created species can this be represented: because every created form is limited.... Hence to say that God through a similitude is seen, is to say that the divine essence is not seen: which is erroneous [*STh* Ia, 12, 2 corp.].

Rahner seems to err, however, when he asserts that God compensates for the absence of a created species in the beatific vision by entitatively informing the human intellect. For the agent intellect in natural human knowledge impresses a created species on the possible intellect, so that the impressed species entitatively informs the possible intellect, only in order to render intelligible that which is: a) absent; b) present only through the mediation of the senses; or c) immaterial and thus not directly perceptible by human beings' natural sensitive and cognitive faculties. In the case of the beatific vision, however, the object intuited is neither absent nor material nor, on account of the *lumen gloriae*, inaccessible to human intuition. The peculiar character of the object intuited, along with the elevation of the human intellect by the *lumen gloriae*, thus renders an entitative information of the possible intellect superfluous in the beatific vision.³⁸³

This is not to say that God does not, in a certain sense, perform the function of an impressed species in the beatific vision. For, as William J. Hill observes, the entitative information of the possible intellect constitutes only one of the impressed species' contributions to natural, human knowledge. In Hill's words:

Ordinarily, the species has a twofold function: one entitative, the other intentional. In the first way, it is an accident, a quality modifying the soul, a form which in informing is absorbed in the actuation of a subject and constitutes with it a new accidental thing. In the second way, it transcends this function of entitative information (and this is due to its spirituality which in turn derives from the spirituality of the intellect) and without any fusing with its subject merely actuates or terminates the soul precisely in

³⁸³ We follow the account of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange in his *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa* (Bede Rose, trans.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1944), 348.

the line of knowledge. It makes the knower to be the known, to be...identified therewith—but only “intentionaliter.”³⁸⁴

On account of the terminative causality God exercises in the beatific vision, therefore, one can and ought to speak of his being united to the created intellect as an intelligible species without in any way suggesting that God communicates himself, in the Rahnerian sense of those words, to the blessed in the beatific vision.

δ. *Conclusion.* Neither Rahner's argument from God's role as quasi-species in the beatific vision nor his argument from the putative identity of being and knowing, then, suffices to establish the integrality of divine self-communication, as Rahner conceives of it, to the beatific vision. Rahner's success in establishing a certain continuity between the ontological presuppositions of the *visio beatifica* and the uncreated grace already possessed by wayfarers notwithstanding, then, his researches into the ontological presuppositions of the beatific vision yield no conclusive proof that the uncreated grace of wayfarers consists in divine self-communication understood in Rahnerian terms.

iii. *The priority of uncreated over created grace.* Rahner's second argument for the necessity of divine self-communication, in his sense of the word, to the bestowal of uncreated grace consists principally in the claim that his understanding of the divine indwelling alone is compatible with the precedence of uncreated over created grace.

α. *The scholastic views.* That uncreated grace, at least broadly speaking, does, in fact, precede created grace both logically and ontologically seems incontestable. People do not, according to Scripture, receive the Holy Ghost, because they love God; rather, “the love of God³⁸⁵ has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Didymus of Alexandria, likewise, avers, “Never, indeed, does anyone receive the spiritual blessings of God unless the Holy

³⁸⁴ “Uncreated Grace—A Critique of Karl Rahner,” *Thomist* 27 (1963), 333-356 at 343-4.

³⁸⁵ We deviate from the NRSV by translating “ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ” as “the love of God” rather than “God's love” in order: a) to render the direct article, ἡ; and b) to show that τοῦ θεοῦ can constitute an objective as well as a subjective genitive.

Spirit has gone before. He, indeed, who has received the Holy Spirit [however] shall, consequently, have blessings: i.e. wisdom and understanding and the others of which the Apostle...writes."³⁸⁶ Rahner, in fact, seems to misrepresent his fellow scholastic theologians when he alleges that they universally dissent from this obvious truth.³⁸⁷

For, first, a great number, including, for instance, Adolphe Tanquerey³⁸⁸ and Paul Galtier,³⁸⁹ subscribe to subjective, causal theories of the indwelling according to which the divine persons impart themselves to the elect when they regenerate and sanctify these souls thus rendering themselves present in a radically new way. According to advocates of this theory, the indwelling divine persons bestow created grace, and there can be no question of a mere creature's introducing uncreated grace, i.e. the divine persons themselves as causing created grace, into the souls of the just.

A considerably greater number, admittedly, including, for instance, Camillo Mazzella³⁹⁰ and Bernard Jungmann,³⁹¹ conceive of the divine indwelling in souls as logically and ontologically subsequent to the presence of created grace in those souls. Such scholastics do not, however, imagine that created grace somehow antecedes the presence of the divine persons as bestowing created grace. They merely hold that such a presence differs from God's natural presence too little to qualify as indwelling.

As Aquinas explains:

God is in all things by essence, power, and presence, according to his one common mode, as a cause in effects that participate in his goodness. Above this common mode, however, there is one special mode, which convenes to the rational creature, in whom God is said to be as the known in the knower and the loved in the lover....Because, by knowing and loving, the rational creature by its own operation attains to God himself, according to this special mode, God is not only said to be in the rational creature, but to *habitare* in it as in his own temple [*STh* Ia. 43, 3 corp.].

A creature can know and love God in a supernatural manner, of course, only if it possesses the created grace which enables it so to do. Scholastics of this persuasion

³⁸⁶ *De Spiritu Sancto* 10; PG 39, 1042A-B. We owe this reference to Gaine, *Indwelling Spirit*, 36.

³⁸⁷ "To assume, as many since Rahner have done," writes Gaine, "that all neo-scholastic theories before Rahner supported the priority of created grace is to take no account of the intention of certain of the theologians concerned and of what they claimed for their theories" (*Indwelling Spirit*, 6).

³⁸⁸ *Synopsis* 2, §184, pp. 135-6.

³⁸⁹ *L'Habitation en nous des trois Personnes: Le fait—le mode* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928²), 209-56.

³⁹⁰ *De gratia Christi: Praelectiones scholastico-dogmaticae* (Rome: Iuvenes Opifices a S. Ioseph, 1905⁵), disp. 5, a. 9, § 2, nn. 1043-51, pp. 734-9.

³⁹¹ *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae specialis: Tractatus de gratia* (Rome: Marietti, 1873), § 264, p. 193.

consider created grace prior to the divine indwelling, therefore, only because they identify this indwelling exclusively with God's objective presence as known and loved.

β. Rahner's position. No scholastic theologian, then, speaks as if some created gift determines where God does and does not dwell. Advocates of subjective, causal theories, moreover, explicitly affirm the logical and ontological priority of uncreated grace in the narrowest sense of the term. Why does Rahner, then, accuse the advocates of causal theories of subordinating uncreated to created grace? Simon Gaine finds the answer to this question in a footnote which appears in Rahner's earliest and principal treatment of the subject and in which Rahner asserts that "a logical (not temporal) priority to created grace should be ascribed to uncreated grace (*as given*, not just *as to be given* or *as causing grace*)." ³⁹² In this remark, Gaine writes:

one may find the reason why Rahner believed that a theory modelled on efficient causality collapses into the priority of created grace. Efficiency may provide a special divine presence, a communicating of self so as to be given in the causing of created grace, but the givenness of uncreated grace is complete only on the basis of the completed created effect when uncreated grace is possessed....This would appear to be insufficient for Rahner because [in his view] created grace must be a logical consequence of God as somehow *already given* (in a non-temporal sense)....And efficiency cannot establish this full givenness, but only the causation of an effect. ³⁹³

According to Gaine's interpretation, which seems to us essentially correct, then, Rahner objects to causal theories, at least in part, because they make a human being's reception of uncreated grace contingent, in an unacceptable way, on the presence of a merely created effect. Rahner himself, however, maintains that a human being cannot receive uncreated grace without a created *dispositio ultima* which stands to uncreated grace in a relation of reciprocal causality. It is unlikely, therefore, that he condemns causal theories solely on the grounds that they make the divine indwelling contingent, albeit in an attenuated sense of the term, on the bestowal of created grace.

Rahner seems to reject causal theories, rather, principally because he disagrees with these theories' advocates about what constitutes divine indwelling, i.e.

³⁹² "Uncreated," *TI* i, 323, n. 5; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 351, Anm. 5.

³⁹³ Simon G. Gaine, *Indwelling Spirit and a New Creation: The Relationship between Uncreated Grace and Created Grace in Neo-Scholastic Catholic Theology* (Oxford: D.Phil. Diss., 1994), 221-2.

uncreated grace in the strictest sense of the term. Causal theorists, as we have already seen, view the possession of God as an object of knowledge and/or love as an inevitable consequence of uncreated grace, but not, strictly speaking, as a necessary constituent of it. On this question, however, Rahner takes the side of the objective theorists. In Rahner's unpublished tractate, *De Gratia Christi*, Gaine relates:

Vásquez's theory [frequently considered the causal theory *par exemplar*]³⁹⁴ ...is rejected as insufficient to explain the indwelling as (allegedly) taught by the Fathers, in which the divine substance is not only present but also possessed. Possession of God as object is thus taken to be an integral part of the indwelling which must then be given an objective explanation of some kind.³⁹⁵

Rahner thus places himself in a virtually unique position within scholastic theology. With the advocates of subjective, causal theories, he maintains uncompromisingly that uncreated grace must possess an absolute precedence over created grace. Yet, with the advocates of objective theories, he maintains that one cannot reasonably describe God as "inhabiting" a soul until it possesses God as an object of knowledge and love: a stance frequently thought to require that created grace precede uncreated grace in order to enable the soul to possess God as the object of its supernatural knowledge and love.

If both of these seemingly contradictory viewpoints are, in fact, objectively valid, then it seems that Rahner's theory is probably the most acceptable account available³⁹⁶ of the relation between uncreated and created grace. For Rahner's theory posits the relative identity even in creatures of being, knowing, and loving³⁹⁷ so that God cannot impart his being without also, by that very act, imparting knowledge and love of himself.

The subjective, causal theories, that is to say, identify God's initial, supernatural action on the soul as indwelling and thus maintain the primacy of uncreated grace only by excising the subsequent acts of knowledge and love from the indwelling's concept. The objective theories, likewise, treat the knowledge and love of God as integral to the divine indwelling only at the expense of excising God's initial,

³⁹⁴ Cf., however, the revisionist interpretation of Leo D. Sullivan in his *Justification and the Inhabitation of the Holy Ghost: The Doctrine of Father Gabriel Vásquez, S.J.* (Rome: PUG, 1940).

³⁹⁵ Gaine, *Indwelling Spirit*, 220.

³⁹⁶ We praise Rahner's theory as "the most acceptable account available" under the specified conditions in order to allow for the possibility of another theologian's developing a superior alternative.

³⁹⁷ Cf. *HW*, 83, 126 (*Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 152, 154, 224); "Incomprehensibility," *TI* xvi, 254 ("Unbegreiflichkeit," *SzTh* xii, 319).

supernatural contact with the soul from the indwelling's concept and thus subordinating uncreated to created grace.

Both subjective and objective theories, then, sacrifice one or the other of Rahner's concerns, viz. the primacy of uncreated grace and the indispensability of supernatural knowledge and love to the indwelling, because neither can conceive of the knowledge and love of God as anything other than logically subsequent to God's initial, supernatural contact with the soul. Rahner, however, by: a) relatively identifying even created being with both knowledge and love; and b) understanding God's supernatural contact with the soul in terms of intrinsic, quasi-formal causality; can c) satisfy both concerns by making human knowledge and love of God not merely temporally, but logically simultaneous with his initial, supernatural action on the soul. Rahner succeeds, therefore, as few others have before or since, in reconciling the two basic orientations of scholastic theology on this subject: a not inconsiderable intellectual feat.

γ. Criticisms. For all its brilliance and originality, however, Rahner's theory of the relation between uncreated and created grace is by no means unproblematic. Critics of Rahner's position on this subject complain principally, in Hill's words, that "it is impossible to see that it does not slight the transcendence of God."³⁹⁸ Since our concern here is to determine whether one must accept Rahner's idea of divine self-communication as true in spite of its apparent inconsistency with divine transcendence, we shall pass over Hill's and similar objections without comment.

At least two other difficulties, however, seem quite relevant in this context. First, as we have seen, Rahner's belief in the relative identity of being, knowing, and loving seems unjustifiably to narrow the spectrum of being by implying that all potential objects of human knowledge can attain some measure of consciousness in the medium of human sensibility. To the extent that Rahner's theory of the relation of uncreated to created grace presupposes the relative identity of created being, knowing, and loving, then, it appears similarly questionable.

A more properly theological objection, second, concerns the seemingly conflicting claims that Rahner's theology of grace seeks to accommodate. As we noted above, Rahner's theory satisfies the most fundamental concerns of both

³⁹⁸ "Uncreated Grace," 356.

subjective and objective theories of the divine indwelling. If the subjective theorist rightly insists that uncreated grace precedes created grace, and the objective theorist rightly insists that God dwells only in those who know him and love him, then Rahner's theory possesses few plausible alternatives. If, however, either school's central claim is objectively invalid, then the synthesis of the two schools' views in Rahner's theory constitutes not an advantage, but a defect. In such a case, Rahner's theory would, in fact, prove false at least to the extent that it affirms the erring school's claim.

Now, it does not seem impossible to supply at least *prima facie* evidence to the effect that one of the two theories might prove, upon examination, more probable than the other. Specifically, certain evidence suggests that those theories which posit a subjective, causal indwelling may prove more tenable than those that envision an objective indwelling in which the soul possesses God as the object of its knowledge and love. Objective theories, for instance, seem ill-equipped to explain how God can dwell as in his temple in the souls of regenerate infants. As regenerate, these infants certainly possess the Holy Spirit, and yet, as infants, they neither know nor love him. "It is a very amazing thing," Augustine writes:

how God is the *inhabitor* of some who do not yet know him and is not of some who do know him. For those do not pertain to the temple of God, who knowing God have not glorified him as God or given thanks, and [yet] to the temple of God pertain infants sanctified by the sacrament of Christ, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who certainly, on account of their age, cannot yet know God; whence, those have been able to know God, but not to possess him; these [however] have been able to possess him before they knew him.³⁹⁹

Admittedly, one ought not to consider the knowledge of God by the wicked as a counterexample to the objective theory, because the wicked never attain the intimate, experimental knowledge of God possessed by the righteous: a knowledge which, incidentally, presupposes his real and not merely intentional presence. Likewise, it seems, one could reasonably concede to the objective theorist that adults possess God as the object of their knowledge and love habitually even when they sleep.

The case of infants, however, seems altogether different. For, when objective theorists claim, as they typically do when faced with this objection, that God dwells in regenerate infants by virtue of his mere bestowal of the unactualized and, at least in early infancy unactualizable, habits of faith and charity, then they at least

³⁹⁹ *Epistula*. 187.21 in CSEL 57, 99-100.

implicitly admit that divine action alone suffices to constitute the indwelling in logical and, in this case, even temporal priority to regenerate persons' possession of God as the object of their actual knowledge and love.

The possession, even by infants who can neither know nor love God, of the indwelling, divine persons strongly suggests, then, at least the possibility of establishing definitively the superiority of a subjective, causal theory of the divine indwelling to objective approaches to the same subject. We do not claim, incidentally, to have accomplished this. We have, however, attempted to show that resolution of the controversy between subjective and objective theories of the divine indwelling by means other than a compromise solution like Rahner's is not inconceivable.

d. Conclusion. It seems, then, that Rahner does not prove that his theory of the divine indwelling alone, with its emphasis on divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense of the term, can account for the Scripturally attested primacy of uncreated over created grace. For Rahner's theory rests on two highly questionable presuppositions: a) that being, knowing, and loving are relatively identical even in the created sphere; and b) that the fundamental claims of both objective and subjective theorists of the divine indwelling are equally valid.

Neither, it seems, can Rahner prove that the beatific vision requires that uncreated grace, as its ontological presupposition, consist in divine self-communication as Rahner understands it. Although Rahner rightly discerns a close relationship between the grace of the wayfarer and the beatifying vision of God, he cannot establish that the beatific vision itself requires divine self-communication, according to his conception of it; *a fortiori*, neither can he demonstrate its integrality to the ontological presupposition of the beatific vision that constitutes the wayfarers' uncreated grace. Rahner does not succeed, then, in demonstrating that divine self-communication in his sense of that term must occur in order for God to impart himself to human beings in uncreated, sanctifying grace.

3. *The Incarnation of the Logos.*

a. Introduction. Rahner argues, nonetheless, that not only uncreated grace, but also the Incarnation of the Logos, as defined by various ecumenical councils teaching in union with the Pope, constitutes an instance of divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense of those words. Since: a) Rahner presupposes the infallibility of ecumenical councils when teaching definitively in union with the Pope; b) the charism of infallibility precludes the possibility of self-contradiction; and c) ecumenical councils have definitively taught, in union with the Pope, the doctrines of divine immutability and the Incarnation of the Logos; then d) if Rahner can establish that the Incarnation constitutes an instance of divine self-communication as he understands it, then his presuppositions concerning the infallibility of ecumenical councils dictate that divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense of that term must be ultimately compatible with divine immutability. If this were, in fact, the case, then our first criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, a criticism that presupposes the incompatibility of divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it with divine immutability, would, at least in the context of a strictly immanent critique, prove invalid.

In the following, accordingly, we intend: first, to outline Rahner's theory of the "uniting unity" in the Incarnation, the keystone of Rahner's case for the integrality of divine self-communication, as he understands it, to the event of the hypostatic union; second, to examine briefly certain of the advantages of Rahner's theory of the uniting unity; third, to explore a number of difficulties for this theory; and, fourth, to determine whether Rahner's theory of the "uniting unity" in the hypostatic union actually constitutes proof that the Incarnation consists in or presupposes divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense.

b. Rahner's theory of the "uniting unity" in the Incarnation. In his theory of the "uniting unity" in the Incarnation, Rahner attempts to specify "by what (i.e. by what uniting unity) they [= Christ's two natures] are united (in the united unity [= Christ's person in both natures])."⁴⁰⁰ The term "uniting unity" as Rahner employs it, seems to denote something at least rationally distinct from the agent that unites Christ's

⁴⁰⁰ "Uncreated," *TI* i, 182, n. 1; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 202, Anm. 3.

human nature to the person of the Logos. For the IV Lateran Council binds Rahner to attribute the hypostatic union to the agency of "the whole Trinity in common,"⁴⁰¹ and he, accordingly, explicitly attributes the bringing about of the Incarnation to the Trinity as a whole: "the effecting of this [hypostatic] union," he writes, "is common to the three divine persons."⁴⁰²

When Rahner asks by what "uniting unity" Christ's two natures come to be united, then, he seems to ask: by what process or mode of causality does the Trinity unite Christ's human nature to the person of the Logos?⁴⁰³ Rahner recognizes that some may consider this question unanswerable. In response, however, he writes:

If someone goes on to maintain that it is impossible to provide a further answer here because it is precisely a mystery with which we are dealing here, it would be necessary to reply that this account [i.e. the statement that "the human nature and the divine nature are united in the person of the Logos"] would suffice provided that the mystery given expression in the original formula remains clear in its meaning (though not in its explanation) even when no answer is offered to the further question. But if this is not the case, i.e. if the united unity in the sense intended (a sense which, though undetected, must be there even in a mystery) does not permit of being thought unless the uniting unity comes into sight, then...[a] *docta ignorantia*...is simply not appropriate here—no matter how far the ancient tradition provides or fails to provide a further explicit question and answer as to the uniting unity.⁴⁰⁴

Rahner does not explain precisely why the mystery's meaning must remain unclear as long as one lacks an account of the uniting unity. He does, nonetheless, make this assumption: an assumption which implies that one can hardly speak of the Incarnation without a theory of the uniting unity, and that the dogma of the hypostatic union thus presupposes at least the possibility of such an account. Given Rahner's presuppositions, then, a proof that his theory, which dictates that the

⁴⁰¹ DH 801.

⁴⁰² "Incarnation C. The Official Teaching of the Church," *SM(E)* iii, 112a-14b at 113b; "Inkarnation III. Die kirchenamtliche Lehre," *SM* ii in *SmtWk* xvii/ii, 1098-1102 at 1101.

⁴⁰³ The following remarks confirm this interpretation. "Someone may object," Rahner writes:

that it is in fact the one hypostasis which is the uniting unity for the two natures. To this we must reply that this may well be true, so far as it is a matter of the two natures in their mutual concord. But the question here is to what extent the divine hypostasis unites the human nature to himself. When the question is formulated like this, the hypostasis, *in so far* as it is just the static concept of *ens per se et in se* which is involved, is something to be united—one 'part' of the united unity, and not the uniting unity. Thus it must be asked by what (i.e. by what uniting unity) the hypostasis unites to himself the human nature. Putting the same thing in another way: unity (as a formal transcendental property of an entity) is never something which can be set up as such, but is always the result of some other state or process among entities. Thus one has not explained nor even understood what one is saying when one elucidates unity by—unity ["Uncreated," *TI* i, 182, n.1; "Ungeschaffene," *SzTh* i, 203, Anm. 3].

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; ebd., 202-3, Anm. 3.

Incarnation occurs through an act of divine self-communication as Rahner understands it, constitutes the only adequate account of the uniting unity would imply that the Incarnation constitutes an instance of divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense.

Rahner's theory of the "uniting unity," in itself, is disarmingly simple. The principle, which Rahner considers axiomatic, that "nearness to God...and genuine creaturehood grow in the same, and not in inverse proportions"⁴⁰⁵ dictates, in Rahner's view, that Jesus Christ, in order to be perfect God, need do no more than perfectly realize the essence of creaturehood. The man Jesus, he writes, "precisely by being man in the fullest sense...is God's Existence into the world."⁴⁰⁶

Since Christ, as perfect man, is *ipso facto* also perfect God, Rahner reasons, the act whereby God constitutes Christ as perfect man must be identical to the act whereby God unites Christ's human nature to the eternal hypostasis of the Logos. "The positing of Christ's humanity in its free distinction from God itself," Rahner writes, "becomes in this way the act of unification...with the Logos."⁴⁰⁷ In Rahner's view, therefore, the uniting unity in the Incarnation "unites *precisely* by making existent;"⁴⁰⁸ the uniting unity unites Christ's human nature with the Logos, that is, simply by creating it.⁴⁰⁹

c. Advantages of Rahner's theory. Rahner finds the idea of assumption by creation advantageous, it seems, for three principal reasons: a) this understanding of the "uniting unity" obviates any seeming contradiction between the divinity of Christ and his full humanity; b) it reflects what Rahner considers a correct view of the relation between the intra-Trinitarian processions and the divine acts *ad extra*; and c) it corresponds to what Rahner considers a contemporary view of God and the world.

⁴⁰⁵ "Intellectual Honesty and Christian Faith," *TI* vii, 47-71 at 68; "Intellektuelle Redlichkeit und christlicher Glaube," *SzTh* vii, 54-76 at 73.

⁴⁰⁶ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 184; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 205.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 183; *ebd.*, 204.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 182; *ebd.*, 202-3.

⁴⁰⁹ In Rahner's view, Joseph Wong explains, "God 'assumes by creating' and 'creates by assuming'" (*Logos-Symbol*, 127). William V. Dych echoes this language almost exactly (*Karl Rahner* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992], 77). Philipp Kaiser, likewise, notes that, according to Rahner, "the humanity of Christ is...not only created 'by the union with the Logos,' but the creation itself, the constitution of the humanity of Christ is itself already its union with the Logos" (*Die Gott-menschliche Einigung in Christus als Problem der spekulativen Theologie seit der Scholastik* [MThS.S 36; München: Max Hueber, 1968], 275).

i. Reconciling Christ's divinity with his full humanity. Probably the strongest point in favor of Rahner's theory of assumption by creation is that it eliminates any appearance of conflict between the unity and the distinctness of Christ's natures. As Rahner explains:

if what makes the human nature ek-sistent as something diverse from God, and what unites this nature with the Logos, are strictly the same, then we have a unity...which does not make the ἀσυγκύτως look like a sort of external counterbalance to the unity, always threatening to dissolve it, but shows...how...unity and distinction [can] become mutually...intensifying characteristics, not competing ones.⁴¹⁰

Rahner's theory of assumption by creation serves, therefore, to counteract in some measure tendencies to exalt Christ's diversity over his unity and *vice versa*: a quality Rahner correctly views as evidence in its favor.

ii. Correlating intra-divine processions and divine acts ad extra. Rahner also seems attracted to his theory, because it corresponds to his understanding of the relation between the intra-Trinitarian processions and God's action vis-à-vis the world. In Rahner's view, all divine acts *ad extra* constitute various aspects of a single "continuation of the immanent constitution of 'image and likeness' [i.e. of the divine Word]"⁴¹¹ within God. In other words, just as the Father communicates his essence to the Son for all eternity, so, in Rahner's view, he communicates his essence, albeit in a much less profound sense and without compromising his transcendence, in creating extra-divine being; God, that is to say, creates by assuming.

Rahner believes, accordingly, that in all divine acts *ad extra* God creates and assumes, at least in some measure, by one and the same act. Given this presupposition, the idea that God creates Christ's human nature and unites it to the Logos by one undifferentiated act of creation-assumption follows as a matter of course. Rahner's theory of the uniting unity in the Incarnation, then, construes this dogma in such a way that it fits seamlessly into his more general theory of divine action as such.

⁴¹⁰ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 181-2; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 202-3.

⁴¹¹ "Symbol," *TI* iv, 236-7; "Symbols," *SmtWk* xviii, 437.

iii. *Adjusting to a contemporary worldview.* Why Rahner would subscribe to this general theory of divine action appears from the third concern that leads Rahner to adopt his theory of the uniting unity in the Incarnation: his belief in the necessity of demythologization. "The theology of the future," he writes, "must be a 'demythologizing' theology."⁴¹² For, in his view, as we have seen, the doctrines of the Christian faith constitute mere "verbalized objectifications of the 'revelation' which is already present in the gratuitous radicalizing of human transcendental in God's self-communication."⁴¹³ Rahner, consequently, considers it his duty to re-interpret Christian doctrine so as to manifest its connection to contemporary persons' experience of divine self-communication.

Since, in his view, "modern man finds nothing illogical in pantheism or panentheism,"⁴¹⁴ Rahner considers himself free to claim that God communicates himself to creation so radically as to become "the very core of the world's reality,"⁴¹⁵ "the total unity of reality,"⁴¹⁶ "the single whole of reality,"⁴¹⁷ and "the innermost constitutive element of man."⁴¹⁸ Rahner rejects the idea of divine intervention, however, as alien to "our modern experience and interpretation of the world"⁴¹⁹ and, accordingly, seeks to understand divine action exclusively in terms of divine self-communication. One can speak truthfully of divine intervention, he writes, only if:

a special "intervention" of God...[is] understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is always already intrinsic to the concrete world....Every real intervention of God in his world...is always only the becoming historical and...concrete of that "intervention" in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground.⁴²⁰

⁴¹² "Possible Courses for the Theology of the Future," *TI* xiii, 32-60 at 42; "Über künftige Wege der Theologie," *SzTh* x, 41-69 at 51. For more on this theme, cf. Michael Barnes, "Demythologization in the Theology of Karl Rahner," *TS* 55 (1994), 24-45.

⁴¹³ "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," *TI* xxi, 158; "Glaubensakt und Glaubensinhalt," *SzTh* xv, 158.

⁴¹⁴ "The Works of Mercy and Their Reward," *TI* vii, 268-74 at 272; "Preis der Barmherzigkeit," *SzTh* vii, 259-64 at 262.

⁴¹⁵ "Specific Character," *TI* xxi, 191; "Eigenart," *SzTh* xv, 190.

⁴¹⁶ "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," *TI* ii, 235-63 at 239; "Würde und Freiheit des Menschen," *SzTh* ii, 247-77 at 251.

⁴¹⁷ *Foundations*, 48; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 51.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116; *ebd.*, 116.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 259; *ebd.*, 255.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87; *ebd.*, 87-8. We have inserted the word "always" between "the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is" and "already intrinsic to the concrete world" in the translation in order more accurately to render Rahner's German text in which one reads of the

According to this understanding of divine action, an Incarnation, if it can occur at all, can constitute no more than a "historical manifestation"⁴²¹ of the same, universal divine influence responsible for creation. The view that God assumes Christ's human nature by creating it and, likewise, creates it by assuming it thus serves to reconcile the doctrine of the Incarnation with what Rahner considers a contemporary view of the world.

d. Difficulties for Rahner's theory. When considered from Rahner's perspective, therefore, his theory of assumption by creation possesses considerable advantages. Two difficulties, however, appear, at least *prima facie*, to threaten the theory's plausibility. First, Rahner's view that the uniting unity "unites *precisely* by making existent"⁴²² seems to rest on a self-contradictory premise: viz., that two entities can be united by their differentiation *simpliciter*. Second, and more significantly, the principle that God assumes by creating seems to imply that every human being possesses the grace of union with the divine Logos. If to create is to assume, then it seems that God cannot create an individual human nature⁴²³ without also assuming it.

i. Unification through differentiation. Rahner attempts to extricate himself from the first difficulty by appealing to his philosophical ontology. Two things can be united by their differentiation *simpliciter*, Rahner affirms, because the thesis, "being is knowing,"⁴²⁴ perhaps the most fundamental tenet of Rahner's philosophy, seems to entail that such unification through differentiation occurs.

In *Geist in Welt*, specifically, Rahner argues that if being is knowing, then, at least in human beings, "knowing will know something to the extent to which it *is* this something."⁴²⁵ Rahner conceives of human knowledge, accordingly, as "a result of

"geschichtliche Konkretheit der transzendentalen Selbstmitteilung Gottes..., die der konkreten Welt immer schon innerlich ist" (ebd.; our emphasis).

⁴²¹ "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," *TI* xi, 215-29 at 226; "Christologie im Rahmen des modernen Selbst- und Weltverständnisses," *SzTh* ix, 227-41 at 238.

⁴²² "Current Problems," *TI* i, 182; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 202-3.

⁴²³ Cf. n. 244.

⁴²⁴ *HW*, 35; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 70.

⁴²⁵ *SW*, 97; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 83.

the ontological unity of object and cognitive faculty.”⁴²⁶ Nevertheless, Rahner also recognizes that in human cognition:

something is always known about something....Every objective knowledge is always and in every case the reference of a universal to a “this.” Hence the “this” appears as the reference point standing over against the knowing to which the knower refers what is...known by him. But then the subject with the content of his knowledge (the universal concept) always stands to some extent at a distance from “this” to which he refers the content of his knowledge.⁴²⁷

Every act of human knowledge, then, requires a simultaneous unification with and differentiation from the object known: something at least roughly analogous to the unification through differentiation which, in Rahner's view, occurs in the Incarnation. While it is not immediately evident that the unification and differentiation characteristic of human knowing as Rahner understands it must coincide in a single act, Rahner argues at great length in his early philosophical work, *Spirit in the World*, that unification and differentiation here do in fact coincide in the one act of “conversion to the phantasm”⁴²⁸: a term Rahner borrows from Aquinas to characterize “the one human knowing.”⁴²⁹

In his later essay, “Zur Theologie des Symbols,” Rahner exploits this model of human cognition in order to characterize the eternal generation of the Logos: an intra-divine procession that, in Rahner's view, the Father extends *ad extra* in the Incarnation. The eternal generation of the Logos, Rahner claims, constitutes a self-differentiating self-communication of the Father's being to that of the Son by which the Father knows himself in the Son. “This process,” Rahner writes, “is necessarily given with the divine act of self-knowledge, and without it the absolute act of divine self-possession in knowledge cannot exist.”⁴³⁰

Since Rahner maintains that being *is* knowing, a correct assumption, of course, *in divinis*, he considers this generation essential not merely to the Father's self-

⁴²⁶ Ibid.; ebd..

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 122; ebd., 101-2.

⁴²⁸ Rahner maintains, that is to say, that both: 1) the apprehension of a known object in sensibility, which he considers a self-alienating union with the other; and 2) the act of abstraction, which Rahner characterizes as a *reditio subjecti in seipsum* in which human beings recognize themselves as distinct from the objects of their cognition; are identical with the one, internally differentiated act of conversion to the phantasm. In the preface to *Geist in Welt*, Rahner writes, “the work could have been entitled, *Conversion to the Phantasm* [ibid., liii; ebd., 15].”

⁴²⁹ Ibid., liv; ebd..

⁴³⁰ “Symbol,” *TI* iv, 236; “Symbols,” *SmtWk* xviii, 436.

awareness but to his very existence. "The Father is himself," writes Rahner, "by the very fact that he opposes to himself the image which is of the same essence as himself, as the person who is other than himself; and so he possesses himself."⁴³¹ The Father, in other words, necessarily generates another by communicating himself and communicates himself by generating another; he unifies himself to the Son, then, precisely by making the Son existent. God in himself, in Rahner's view, and not merely God incarnate, thus constitutes "the initially existing uniting unity."⁴³²

Since Rahner identifies being and knowing at least relatively in all beings whatsoever, furthermore, he holds that each being must constitute itself by a self-communicating self-differentiation analogous to the Father's. "Each being," Rahner writes, "forms, in its own way, more or less perfectly according to its degree of being, something distinct from itself and yet one with itself, 'for' its own fulfillment."⁴³³ In other words, each being constitutes something of a uniting unity; absolutely everything, not excluding the God-man himself, constitutes itself through some act of unification through differentiation.

One can reasonably ask, however, whether Rahner's ontology really justifies such a sweeping conclusion. In *Geist in Welt*, after all, Rahner specifically admits that a "differentiation of subject and object...does not belong to the essence of knowing as such. On the contrary, knowing as such is to be understood first of all as a being's being-present-to-self....The apprehension of an 'in-itself' is therefore conceivable without setting apart in opposition the knowing subject and the object, [i.e.] without a judgment as affirmative synthesis."⁴³⁴

In a footnote to this last sentence, the young Rahner concludes, "therefore God, for example, does not judge."⁴³⁵ At this stage of his career, then, Rahner specifically rejects the view that divine self-knowledge presupposes an interior opposition between subject and object. Evidently, Rahner changes his mind at some point between the composition of *Spirit in the World* and that of "The Theology of the

⁴³¹ Ibid.; ebd..

⁴³² "Unity of the Church—Unity of Mankind," *TI* xx, 154-72 at 162; "Einheit der Kirche—Einheit der Menschheit," *SzTh* xiv, 382-404 at 391. We substitute "uniting unity" for the translator, Edward Quinn's, rendering, "unifying unity," because Rahner himself writes here not *einigende Einheit*, of which "unifying unity" would be the more literal translation, but *einende Einheit*, the *terminus technicus* from "Probleme," which the translator of *SzTh* i, Cornelius Ernst, renders as "uniting unity."

⁴³³ "Symbol," *TI* iv, 228; "Symbols," *SmtWk* xviii, 429.

⁴³⁴ *SW*, 130; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 107.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., n. 22; ebd., Anm. 24.

Symbol." Yet he nowhere explains precisely why he comes to reject his former position. It seems less than obvious, therefore, that Rahner's ontology actually dictates that God does, or even can, execute the kind of unificative self-differentiation required by his theory of the uniting unity.

ii. The singularity of the hypostatic union. The graver and more properly theological of the two difficulties, in any event, is surely the second: viz. that Rahner's view of the uniting unity in the Incarnation seems not to cohere with the revealed datum that the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ alone. In the following, accordingly, we intend to examine this difficulty and Rahner's response(s) in their various facets and to measure Rahner's success in reconciling the idea of assumption by creation with the exclusivity of the hypostatic union.

α. The extent of the problem. Even a cursory glance at Rahner's statements on this subject will show that he tends to emphasize the continuities between Christ and his fellow human beings. "The Incarnation of God," writes Rahner, "is the unique and *highest* instance of the actualization of the essence of human reality."⁴³⁶ Again, Rahner affirms, "the God-Man...neither is nor can be graced in itself with a closeness to God and an encounter with God which is essentially different from *the* encounter and self-communication of God which is in fact intended for *every* person in grace."⁴³⁷

Rahner maintains, moreover, that the very act of creating a human being constitutes also an at least partial assumption into the person of the Logos so that the grace possessed by all human beings constitutes an "unfolding within human nature of the union of the human with the Logos."⁴³⁸ Rahner affirms, therefore, the existence of a "universal God-manhood inherent in the spiritual creature as such."⁴³⁹

He believes, however, that he can advance such theses without even tacitly imputing the hypostatic union to the entire human race as long as he treats the "God-

⁴³⁶ *Foundations*, 218; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 210.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 218-19; *ebd.*

⁴³⁸ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 199-200; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 221.

⁴³⁹ "Methodology," *TI* xi, 97; "Methode," *SzTh* ix, 109. Cf. Rahner's similar remarks in "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," *TI* v, 15; "Über die Möglichkeit des Glaubens heute," *SzTh* v, 24; and *Ich glaube an Jesus Christus* (Theologische Meditationen 21: Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1975), 37.

manhood" possessed by human beings other than Christ as "deficient modes of this primary Christological relation."⁴⁴⁰ It seems, moreover, that this proviso would abundantly suffice to vindicate Rahner from the charge of universalizing the hypostatic union but for two difficulties.

β. The absoluteness of the divine nature. First, if the "primary Christological relation" consists in the possession of a divine and a human nature by a single, ontological subject; and if, as Rahner correctly observes, "God...is absolute and simple spirit,"⁴⁴¹ then one cannot intelligibly speak of "deficient modes" of this relation. For a truly absolute being does not admit of being morcellated into distinct degrees so that various subjects can instantiate it to a greater or lesser extent. As Gerald O'Collins justly observes: "One who is God is beyond degrees (and hence differences of degree), because being truly divine means being indivisible."⁴⁴²

γ. The oscillating hypostasis. Second, and viewing the problem from the opposite angle, one cannot intelligibly refer to a human nature as both enhypostatic in itself and anhypostatic in the same respect. Yet Rahner's position seems to imply, and Rahner himself explicitly states, that all individual, human natures other than Christ's oscillate between these two extremes. Rahner claims, specifically: a) that "man is insofar as he abandons himself to the absolute mystery whom we call God";⁴⁴³ b) that Christ's individual, human nature abandons its hypostasis to the Logos when "this is done in the strictest sense and reaches an unsurpassable pitch of achievement";⁴⁴⁴ and c) that every human nature other than Christ's gives itself to the Logos in some measure, but fails to give itself absolutely so that "in its ek-stasy [it] constantly falls back upon itself and becomes hypo-static in itself."⁴⁴⁵

In thesis a) Rahner seems to identify human existence with the act of self-abandonment to God. As we have already seen, such an identification is highly problematic; for "as an act of knowing or striving the immanent action is

⁴⁴⁰ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 165; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 186.

⁴⁴¹ Immanent and Transcendent," *TI* x, 287; "Immanente und transzendente," *SmtWk* xv, 555.

⁴⁴² Gerald O'Collins, "The Incarnation under Fire," *Greg* 76 (1995), 263-80 at 263.

⁴⁴³ *Foundations*, 218; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 210.

⁴⁴⁴ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 109; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 142.

⁴⁴⁵ "Person" in *CTD*, 351-4 at 352; "Person" in *KThW*¹, *SmtWk* 17/1, 752-5 at 753-4.

characterized by a certain indeterminacy or infiniteness: ...one can think whatever is true and love whatever is good....The being of things, however, is always limited to this or that individual in a particular species and a particular genus. It is the...reality of precisely this or that thing."⁴⁴⁶ If human existence were identical with some immanent, human act, therefore, human beings could never constitute *mere* human beings.

Rahner, admittedly, seems not only to accept, but to celebrate this consequence of his position. "The very definition of man," he writes, "is his indefinability, i.e. precisely his transcendence as absolute openness to being in the absolute."⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, the limitless elasticity of the human essence seems to constitute a presupposition of his theory of assumption by creation. "Only someone who forgets that the essence of man...is to be unbounded (thus in this sense, to be un-definable)," Rahner asserts, "can suppose that it is impossible for there to be a man, who, precisely by being man in the fullest sense..., is God's Existence into the world."⁴⁴⁸

Such a hollowing out of the essence of humanity, however, seems inconsistent with the Chalcedonian formula insofar as: a) one cannot reasonably speak of an infinitely elastic nature as ἀτρέπτως; and b) such a nature would seem to possess no particular ἰδιώτης. Rahner's understanding of human nature also raises the question of how an identical subjectivity could survive a process of infinite, ontological self-transcendence. Thesis a), then, on account of the highly unconventional view of human nature it implies, seems liable to a number of weighty objections.

Thesis b), Rahner's claim that Christ's human nature abandons its hypostasis to the second person of the Trinity proves similarly problematic. For Christ could not have abandoned a merely human hypostasis to the Logos if, as Rahner correctly grants, he never possessed a merely human hypostasis. If he had somehow managed to donate his hypostasis to God, moreover, this would not necessarily have rendered his human nature enhypostatic in the eternal Logos. It seems, rather, that such an act would have added a hypostasis to the divine nature and thus converted the holy Trinity into a quaternity. Yet, according to the fifth canon of the II Council of

⁴⁴⁶ Leo Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 1993), 260.

⁴⁴⁷ "Immanent and Transcendent," *TI* x, 279; "Immanente und transzendente," *SmtWk* xv, 548.

⁴⁴⁸ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 184; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 205.

Constantinople, "the Holy Trinity did not receive the addition of a person, i.e. a hypostasis, even through the Incarnation of God the Word."⁴⁴⁹

Rahner attempts to avoid these difficulties by identifying the divine act of creating Christ's human nature with the Logos' act of surrendering his own subsistence in Jesus to himself. When Christ's human nature surrenders itself to the Logos, Rahner writes, "this 'act' of self-surrender is...primarily the 'act' of the Creator in making human nature, and not something done 'accidentally' by man as a creature in his *actus secundus* deriving from his own decision."⁴⁵⁰ It seems, however, that one could reasonably identify the divine act of creating Christ's human nature with the *actus primus* of Christ *qua* creature *only* if one identified this creaturely *actus primus*, i.e. the sacred humanity's act of existing, with the divine existence of the Logos.

By identifying the divine act of creating Christ's human nature with his creaturely *actus primus*, that is, it seems that Rahner either: 1) identifies a divine creative act with a merely creaturely act of existing and thus confuses an act with its presupposition; or 2) commits himself to a "one *esse*" account of Christ's ontological constitution according to which Christ lacks a distinctively human act of existence. Such an account, of course, might prove reasonable in itself, but it would ill accord with Rahner's explicit condemnation of Christological "mono-existentialism,"⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ DH 426.

⁴⁵⁰ "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 109, n. 1; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 142, Anm. 1.

⁴⁵¹ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 160; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 181. John M. McDermott, ordinarily a highly perceptive commentator on Rahner's works, does, admittedly, claim that Rahner's "Christology...ignore[s] the question of the existence(s) of Jesus Christ," and that Rahner "nowhere...explicitly consider[s] the question of the number of existences in Christ" ("The Christologies of Karl Rahner," *Greg* 67 [1986], 87-123, 297-327 at 89-90, n. 12 and 309). At a 1961 symposium on Christology, however, Rahner offers what he regards as a reconciliation of the view that Christ's human nature exists by the existence of the Word with the view that this nature possesses its own *esse secundarium*. "The *esse secundarium*," he asks:

can it not be conceived as that which is given by the divine *esse* to this nature, inasmuch as it exists? This question is truly quite complex: in effect, on the one hand, one must assign to the divine *esse* a formal causality, and not solely efficient....On the other hand, an infinite act communicating itself to a finite potency...is neither limited nor restrained. Nevertheless, that which is in the [human] nature itself, is and remains finite and limited in a certain manner. That is why we are only able to distinguish in God a formal cause and its formal effect. It is in this sense that a conciliation between the two opinions is possible ["Débats sur le rapport du P. Patfoort," *Problèmes actuels*, 414-15].

In these remarks as well as in the condemnation of "mono-existentialism" referred to in the main text, Rahner at least seems to ascribe two *esses*, the Logos' *esse divinum*, and a creaturely *esse secundarium*, to the incarnate Christ. Rahner's beliefs, moreover: a) that creatureliness increases in direct, and not inverse, proportion to unity with God; b) that Christ possesses a creaturely as well as a divine self-consciousness ("Current Problems," *TI* i, 158; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 178), at least when this

which he treats as a species of the heresy of monotheletism. It seems, therefore, that one can construe thesis b) as defensible only if one imputes to Rahner an understanding of Christ's existence(s) that conflicts with his explicit statements on this subject.

Thesis c), likewise, presents Rahner with something of a paradox. As we have seen, in order to view the hypostatic union as the perfect fulfillment of a relation partially realized by all human beings, Rahner claims that every merely human person attempts to become enhypostatic in the Logos. "We always attempt in principle," he writes, "to come nearer to this goal without ever reaching it."⁴⁵² "Precisely in his transcendence," however, the merely human person, in Rahner's view, "always falls back again into his separating subsistence."⁴⁵³

Yet Rahner nowhere answers the question: from whence does the human being fall? A human nature can be enhypostatic in itself and, as the case of Christ proves, anhypostatic in itself. But the idea: a) that human beings can launch themselves from a state of merely human *enhypostasia* towards the asymptotically approachable goal of *anhypostasia* and fall back again; and b) that human beings do so continually, as if bouncing on an ontological trampoline; seems highly counter-intuitive, if not absurd.

e. Assessment. Rahner, then, sincerely and creatively attempts to establish the possibility of unification through differentiation and to reconcile his theory of assumption by creation with the revealed fact that the Word became flesh in only one human being. Rahner's efforts in the latter direction, however, land him in a

belief is considered in conjunction with his identification of being and knowing (*SW*, 69; *GW*, *SmtWk* ii, 62); and c) that created essence and existence are not really distinct (cf. the texts adduced and the implications drawn from them in Denis J. M. Bradley, "Rahner's *Spirit in the World*: Aquinas or Hegel," *Thomist* 41 [1977], 167-99 at 180-83); all seem to demand that Christ possess a second, creaturely *esse*. We follow Heijden, to whom we owe argument b (*Karl Rahner*, 408-10), and Guy Mansini, from whom we learned of Rahner's symposium remarks ("Quasi-Formal Causality and 'Change in the Other': A Note on Karl Rahner's Christology," *Thomist* 52 [1988], 293-306 at 294, n. 7), therefore, in ascribing a two-*esse* account of Christ's ontological constitution to Rahner.

⁴⁵² "Thoughts on the Theology of Christmas," *TI* iii, 24-34 at 33; "Zur Theologie der Weihnachtsfeier," *SzTh* iii, 35-46 at 45. Rahner believes that such "attempts" constitute an experience analogous to the Incarnation. By meditating on "the prolongation of our own spiritual existence," he writes, "we may get some idea of what it means that God has become man" (*ibid.*; *ebd.*, 44-5). Cf. also Rahner's "Christmas in the Light of the Ignatian Exercises," *TI* xvii, 3-7 at 6-7; "Weihnacht im Licht der Exerziten," *SzTh* xii, 329-34 at 332-3.

⁴⁵³ "Thoughts on the Theology of Christmas," *TI* iii, 31; "Zur Theologie der Weihnachtsfeier," *SzTh* iii, 43.

veritable thicket of difficulties. The idea of graded instantiations of divinity, for instance, seems at least as unorthodox as that of a universal hypostatic union. Rahner's confusion of human being with particular human acts, moreover, and his concept of the oscillating hypostasis seem to render his theory incredible to all but those willing to accept certain highly controversial presuppositions. Rahner's theory of the uniting unity, consequently, seems intrinsically implausible and, therefore, insufficient to establish the indispensability of divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it to the accomplishment of the Incarnation.

4. Christ's absolute saviorhood

a. Introduction. Rahner argues, nonetheless, that not only the doctrines of sanctifying grace and the Incarnation, but also that of Christ's status as "absolute savior" presupposes the occurrence of divine self-communication in the radical, Rahnerian sense of that term. Now, it does seem that ecumenical councils teaching in union with the Pope have taught definitively that Christ constitutes in some sense the "absolute savior," i.e. the one person on whom all salvation history hinges. If, accordingly, Rahner can prove: a) that Christ could not constitute the "absolute savior" without being the recipient of a divine self-communication in his sense of the term; then it seems that his assumption b) of the absolute truthfulness and, therefore, consistency of ecumenical, conciliar pronouncements ratified by the Pope; when combined with c) the datum that such councils have unambiguously affirmed the doctrine of divine immutability; would, indeed, imply d) that God can communicate himself in the Rahnerian sense of those terms without compromising his absolute immutability. In this case, our first criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, which presupposes the incompatibility of the kind of self-communication Rahner ascribes to God with the doctrine of divine immutability, would prove invalid.

b. Rahner's argument. Rahner's argument that Christ's "absolute saviorhood" requires divine self-communication as Rahner conceives of it takes the following form.

1. "What is revealed and then pondered upon in theology is not an arbitrary matter, but something which is intended for man's salvation;"⁴⁵⁴ every revealed datum, that is to say possesses "significance for salvation"⁴⁵⁵ (*Heilsbedeutsamkeit*).
2. "Only those things can belong to man's salvation which, when lacking, injure his being and wholeness."⁴⁵⁶
3. In order to be *heilsbedeutsam*, therefore, a reality must be something for which human beings possess an exigence.
4. The doctrine of Christ's "absolute saviorhood" can be *heilsbedeutsam*, therefore, only to the extent that human beings possess an exigence for an "absolute savior."
5. Human beings can possess an exigence for an "absolute savior," however, only to the extent that he corresponds, in a way no other human being can, to an *a priori*, supernatural desire.
6. Jesus of Nazareth can correspond to such an *a priori*, supernatural desire only insofar as he guarantees, in a way a mere prophet cannot, the fulfillment of human hopes for divine self-communication.
7. Jesus can constitute an irrevocable guarantee of the fulfillment of the human desire for divine self-communication, in a way no merely human prophet can, only if his being is "the reality of God himself in such a unique way that God would disown *his very self* if he should supersede it because of its created finiteness."⁴⁵⁷
8. Christ's being can constitute a "reality of God himself" in this way only if God communicates himself to Christ's human nature in the Rahnerian sense of those terms.
9. Christ's absolute saviorhood is evidently revealed and, therefore, *heilsbedeutsam*.
10. God, therefore, must have communicated himself to Christ in the distinctively Rahnerian sense of those terms.

⁴⁵⁴ "Theology and Anthropology," *TI* ix, 28-45 at 35; "Theologie und Anthropologie," *SzTh* viii, 43-65 at 51.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 52.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 51.

⁴⁵⁷ "Jesus Christ—The Meaning of Life," *TI* xxi, 217; "Jesus Christus—Sinn des Lebens," *SzTh* xv, 214.

c. Criticisms.

i. Introduction. If one presupposes Rahner's views as to what the "absolute savior" must be in order to qualify as *heilsbedeutsam*, then the hypothesis that God communicates himself in the radical, Rahnerian sense to Christ's human nature seems inescapable. The idea that a reality can possess *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* only to the extent that human beings possess an exigence precisely for that reality, however, seems incompatible with: 1) a central tenet of Rahner's Christology, viz. that the mysteries of the life of Jesus such as his circumcision, his baptism, his transfiguration, his agony in Gethsemane are significant for contemporary, Christian life and thought; and 2) a fundamental claim of Rahner's theology as a whole, viz. that all elements of categorical experience mediate human beings' supernaturally elevated transcendentality to them.

ii. The mysteries of Jesus' life.

α. The mysteries' significance for Rahner's Christology. Rahner's insistence on the importance of the details of Christ's life, admittedly, might seem to constitute a secondary element in Rahner's Christology in comparison to the theory of the "absolute savior." Insofar as Rahner's concern for these events results from and, to some extent, even motivates his theory of the "uniting unity," however, this concern deserves to be taken seriously.

The connection between Rahner's concern for the mysteries of Christ's life and the unquestionably central theory of the "uniting unity" appears from the following passages, taken from the essay in which Rahner originally proposes the idea of a "uniting unity." In neo-scholastic Christology, Rahner asks:

What do we hear of Christ's Circumcision, Baptism, his prayer, the Transfiguration, the Presentation in the Temple,, the Mount of Olives, the abandonment by God on the Cross, the descent into the underworld, the Ascension into heaven and so on? Nothing, or pretty well nothing....Instead of a genuine theology of Christ's life, we find that the theology...of certain abstract privileges enjoyed by

Christ has forced itself into the foreground; and that this theology draws attention to certain features...which distinguish him from us....⁴⁵⁸

Rahner clearly, then, considers neo-scholastic Christology insufficiently attentive to the mysteries of the life of Jesus. He attributes this inattentiveness, moreover, to neo-scholasticism's excessively abstract and formalistic account of the unity of Christ: an account that, in Rahner's view, addresses the issue of the "united unity" in the Incarnation as accomplished, but leaves the question of the "uniting unity" unasked. Rahner writes, accordingly, that neo-scholasticism's turn from the concrete events of Christ's life to those privileges that distinguish him from ordinary, human beings:

is conditioned...by that purely formal understanding of the unity of Christ as united, of which we have spoken above. In a conception like this an event in the field of Christ's humanity only has 'interest' in so far as it is dignified by being adopted by Christ's person, and thus precisely not in itself; or again, in so far as it possesses special features not to be found elsewhere among human beings.⁴⁵⁹

Having thus explained the neglect of the mysteries of Christ's life in neo-scholastic theology, Rahner proceeds to commend his theory of the "uniting unity" in the Incarnation precisely on the grounds that its conception of Christ's human nature as the self-exteriorization of the Logos warrants attention to the details of Christ's life. "If we are to have a true theology of the life of Jesus (not merely a theology of the extraordinary in Jesus' life)," Rahner argues:

we must learn to see that what is human in Jesus...not [as] something human...and '*in addition*' God's as well...[but as] God's Ek-sistence...: it is human reality *and so* God's and *vice versa*. Then it will no longer be necessary to ask the question: What is there exceptional about this life over and beyond ours as we are already familiar with it..., what is there about it...which could make it important for us too? But the question we must ask is: What does our life mean...when it is first and last the life of God? It is because we need this ultimate interpretation of our lives, one which is not to be had elsewhere, that we must study the theology of Christ's life and death.⁴⁶⁰

The understanding of Christ's human nature that Rahner describes here is, of course, precisely that which the theory of the uniting unity implies. Insofar, then, as:

- 1) the theory of the uniting unity, an unquestionably central aspect of Rahner's

⁴⁵⁸ "Current Problems," *TI* i, 190-1; "Probleme," *SzTh* i, 211.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 191; *ebd.*

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-2; *ebd.*, 212.

Christology, implies that one ought to regard the mysteries of Jesus' life as *heilsbedeutsam*; and 2) the theory seems to be formulated, to a certain extent at least, precisely in order to foster an appreciation of these mysteries' *Heilsbedeutsamkeit*; it seems reasonable 3) to consider Rahner's insistence on the *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* of the mysteries of Christ's life a central tenet of his Christology.

β. Implications for the concept of absolute savior. In one of the central claims of his Christology, therefore, Rahner grants that relatively minor details of Christ's life are *heilsbedeutsam*. This seems to imply that certain events can possess *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* even though one cannot reasonably claim that human beings possess any exigence precisely for those events. In this case, accordingly, Christ's absolute saviorhood could conceivably be *heilsbedeutsam* even if human beings possessed no exigence for an absolute savior.

This implies, it seems, that one cannot validly argue that God must have communicated himself, in the Rahnerian sense of those terms, to Christ's human nature simply because, otherwise, Christ would not fulfill an exigence of human beings. For, if the mysteries of Christ's life can be *heilsbedeutsam* without corresponding to some exigence in human beings precisely for them, then it seems that Christ himself could also be *heilsbedeutsam* without fulfilling this condition. Insofar as the mysteries of Christ's life are genuinely *heilsbedeutsam*, then, it seems that the absence of divine self-communication, as Rahner conceives of it, to Jesus' human nature would not pose an insuperable obstacle to his serving as "absolute savior."

iii. The Heilsbedeutsamkeit of all categorical experience. Intra-Christological considerations alone, therefore, suffice to establish that Rahner cannot consistently treat divine self-communication, as he understands it, to Christ's human nature as a precondition to Christ's *Heilsbedeutsamkeit*. One may establish this conclusion much more directly, however, on the basis of a thesis which, while extrinsic to Christology as such, forms a basic component of Rahner's theology as a whole: Rahner's claim that "supernaturally elevated transcendentality is...mediated to itself by any and every categorical reality in which and through which the subject becomes

present to itself.”⁴⁶¹ Insofar as Rahner treats the reality posited by this claim as an indispensable presupposition of the possibility of accepting God's offer of divine self-communication in Christ athematically, or “anonymously,” one cannot reasonably dismiss the thesis in question as a secondary element in Rahner's thought. An unquestionably central, albeit not specifically Christological, tenet of Rahner's theology, then, dictates that Rahner cannot consistently argue that Jesus could be *heilsbedeutsam* only if he received a divine self-communication according to Rahner's understanding of that term.

iv. Assessment. Rahner's insistence: a) on the *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* of the mysteries of Christ's life; and b) more generally, on the *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* of all aspects of categorical experience; therefore, conflicts with a central premise of Rahner's argument from Christ's absolute saviorhood to the occurrence of divine self-communication as he conceives of it: viz. that something can be *heilsbedeutsam* only if it is implicitly anticipated in human beings' athematic hope for divine self-communication.

d. Excursus on the views of Bruce Marshall.

i. Introduction. This conclusion, incidentally, resonates significantly with criticisms of Rahner's theory of the absolute savior voiced by Bruce Marshall. According to Rahner, Marshall explains, “any reality, object, or person can be significant for our salvation (*heilsbedeutsam*) only because and in so far as we are oriented to it by our very nature; only by falling within the scope of...[our] transcendental orientation can any reality affect us as a whole and so be genuinely saving.”⁴⁶² Since Jesus, in Rahner's view, can be the absolute savior only to the extent that he is *heilsbedeutsam*, it seems to Marshall that Jesus Christ “as a particular person...[i.e. as] the bearer of a proper name, who has determinate, describable features and who is located in a unique stretch of space and time”⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ *Foundations*, 151; *Grundkurs*, SmtWk xxvi, 149

⁴⁶² *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 56.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

cannot be the absolute savior in Rahner's sense of the term. Rahner's theory of the absolute savior, rather, entails, in Marshall's view, that:

this status can apply to Jesus only as a positive person or 'vague individual'. That is, on Rahner's procedure, Jesus Christ can be the absolute savior only in abstraction from and without regard for, his proper name, determinate features and unique spatio-temporal location, without, in other words, everything which makes him Jesus and so distinguishes him from any other individual. He is the absolute savior only with respect to the bare form of individuality in him, that is, only in so far as he is an indeterminate, independently existing human subject. For in this respect alone do we anticipate him in our transcendental orientation and so in this respect alone can we, on Rahner's account, rightly consider him significant for salvation.⁴⁶⁴

Marshall concludes, on the basis of these considerations, that Rahner's restrictive criteria for *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* implicitly conflict with Rahner's own conviction that Jesus Christ, *qua* particular and not merely "positive"⁴⁶⁵ person, possesses *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* in a pre-eminent degree. This conclusion seems both correct and identical with that of our own argument from Rahner's assertion of the *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* of the mysteries of Jesus' life.

ii. Difficulties for Marshall's position.

α. Introduction. Marshall's argument for one of this conclusion's presuppositions, viz. that Rahner actually does consider Jesus, *qua* particular person, *heilsbedeutsam*, however, seems unsound. Specifically, Marshall takes a number of more or less innocuous statements in Rahner's corpus to mean that Rahner holds to the following principle: "an admissible account of 'that which is significant for salvation' cannot fail to include and be governed by reference to Jesus Christ."⁴⁶⁶ Now, since: a) Rahner seems explicitly and consciously to repudiate this principle in certain of his writings; and b) the texts on which Marshall relies to establish Rahner's subscription

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁶⁵ "As a 'positive' reality," writes Marshall, "an individual is simply a single instance of a class or nature, irrespective of the particular 'when', 'where' and description under which that individual actually exists" (ibid., 89). Marshall introduces his distinction between positive and particular individuals in ibid., 44-6.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 54

to this principle appear susceptible of other interpretations; it seems that Marshall does not prove that Rahner unambiguously endorses the principle in question.

β. Textual evidence against Marshall's thesis. For, first, Rahner explicitly states that in order to demonstrate Jesus' salvific significance, one must first possess a more general, pre-Christological concept of salvific significance. The following remarks, for instance, seem typical of the late Rahner's stance on this subject.

Have we thought out in a reflexive way...how it is that another human being is able to have...an absolute meaning for me as an individual, that is, for another human being at all, in the way that we ascribe to Jesus Christ this absolute meaning he has for us?...How can I encounter someone from the past, Thutmosis or Napoleon or Goethe, and somehow or other discover in their person and work a meaning that challenges me and summons me to decision? These and similar general anthropological, existential-ontological considerations would have to be made and developed by us Christians with much more exactitude, love, thoroughness, and discernment in order to have some kind of a framework of understanding, a horizon that was reflected upon, for the teaching that tells us, "There is something crucial in my relationship to Jesus of Nazareth."⁴⁶⁷

Again, in the opening pages of *Ich glaube an Jesus Christus*, Rahner insists that a credible defense of Christian faith in the person of Jesus must present an answer to "the old question...of whether and how...a contingent thing, encountering one 'accidentally' from without, indeed a reality situated in a vastly remote point in history, can have...an ultimate significance for the existence of a human being at all."⁴⁶⁸ Textual evidence exists, therefore, for the view that Rahner regards a (logically) pre-Christological understanding of *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* in general a prerequisite to the task of making Christ's particular, salvific significance intelligible. *Pace* Marshall, accordingly, it seems less than obvious that "Rahner certainly takes...for granted" the principle: "an admissible account of 'that which is significant for salvation' cannot fail to include and be governed by reference to Jesus Christ"⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ "Brief Observations on Systematic Christology Today," *TI* xxi, 228-38 at 236; "Kleine Anmerkungen zur systematischen Christologie heute," *SzTh* xv, 225-35 at 233.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ich glaube*, 13.

⁴⁶⁹ Marshall, *Christology*, 54.

γ. *Evidence for Marshall's thesis?* Second, and more importantly, the texts Marshall proffers as evidence of Rahner's allegiance to this principle do not seem to prove Marshall's point. The texts in question are three:

- a. "Catholic faith and its dogmatics as they have been understood up to now, and also as they will have to be understood in the future, remain indissolubly bound up (*unablösbar gebunden*) not only with the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth, but also with the historical events of a specific kind which took place during his life;"⁴⁷⁰
- b. "Where 'Jesus is nothing more than one of the relatively numerous exemplary persons (*vorbildlichen Menschen*), one would no longer be dealing with Christianity;"⁴⁷¹ and
- c. "When the longing for the absolute nearness of God...looks for where this nearness came—not in the postulates of the spirit, but in the flesh and in the housings of the earth: then no resting place can be found except in Jesus of Nazareth, over whom the star of God stands."⁴⁷²

In the first sentence, Rahner asserts, in other words, that the multi-dimensional wholes, "Catholic faith" and "its dogmatics," are "indissolubly bound up" with the events of Jesus' life. Now, it seems that one could reasonably assert that the tenets of Catholic faith and dogmatics *in globo* are indissolubly bound up with the particularities of Christ's life and without thereby implying that every, particular tenet of "Catholic faith" and "its dogmatics" includes and is governed by reference to Jesus Christ. To the extent that this is the case, Marshall's first text seems not to constitute an unambiguous endorsement of the dictum: "an admissible account of

⁴⁷⁰ "Remarks on the Importance of the History of Jesus for Catholic Dogmatics," *TI* xiii, 201-12 at 201; "Bemerkungen zur Bedeutung der Geschichte Jesu für die katholische Dogmatik," *SzTh* x, 215-26 at 215 as quoted in Marshall, *Christology*, 54.

⁴⁷¹ *Karl Rahner im Gespräch* 1 (Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, ed.; Munich: Kösel, 1982), 163 as translated by Marshall and quoted in his *Christology*, 54.

⁴⁷² "Incarnation," *TI* iv, 120; "Menschwerdung," *SzTh* iv, 155 quoted in Marshall, *Christology*, 74, n. 108.

'that which is significant for salvation' cannot fail to include and be governed by reference to Jesus Christ."⁴⁷³ In the second text, likewise, Rahner seems to indicate only that belief in the absolute saviorhood of Jesus Christ constitutes an indispensable element of explicit Christianity: not that every element of official Christianity conforms to the just-quoted principle. The third text, finally, seems to indicate only that Rahner considers Jesus alone the absolute savior. Neither in itself nor in its context does this sentence seem to address the larger question of how theoretical accounts of *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* ought to relate to Jesus Christ *qua* particular person. Marshall seems, therefore, not to supply adequate, textual warrant for his claim that Rahner's subscribes to the principle: "an admissible account of 'that which is significant for salvation' cannot fail to include and be governed by reference to Jesus Christ."⁴⁷⁴

δ. Evaluation. Since Rahner's explicit statements suggest that he considers reference to Christ in his historical particularity dispensable to accounts of *Heilsbedeutsamkeit*, and Marshall does not succeed in proving the contrary, it seems, in fact, that Rahner at least implicitly denies the principle in question.

iii. Conclusion. His brilliant critique of Rahner's restrictive criteria for *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* and absolute saviorhood notwithstanding, then, Marshall appears to misunderstand the kind of problem these criteria pose for Rahner's theology. Marshall errs, that is to say, when he claims that "by attempting to establish the credibility and meaningfulness of a saving reality...by an appeal to general criteria for such a reality, without reference to Jesus Christ, Rahner makes it impossible actually to maintain his assumption that whatever is *heilsbedeutsam* must be ascribed only to Jesus Christ as a particular person."⁴⁷⁵ Rahner makes no such assumption. The view that Jesus Christ can possess *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* only to the extent that humanity's athematic hope for divine self-communication anticipates him, rather, appears problematic: a) for Rahner's Christology, because it conflicts with his insistence on the significance of the mysteries of Jesus' life; and b) for Rahner's

⁴⁷³ Marshall, *Christology*, 54.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid..

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 88-9.

theology as a whole, because Rahner's understanding of revelation as transcendental commits him to the view that every facet of human experience is *heilsbedeutsam*.

e. Summary. In any event, prescind from the validity or invalidity of Marshall's argument as an immanent critique of Rahner's thought, it seems certain that Rahner: a) considers the mysteries of Christ's life *heilsbedeutsam*; and b) that he, in fact, considers all aspects of the world as experienced by human beings *heilsbedeutsam*. Insofar as Rahner's argument from Christ's absolute saviorhood to the occurrence of divine self-communication as he understands it depends upon an account of *Heilsbedeutsamkeit* that precludes the salvific significance of the realities mentioned in a) and many of those mentioned in b) accordingly, Rahner's argument seems unsound by the standards of his own theology.

5. Results. It seems, accordingly, that the argument: a) that Rahner acknowledges the infallibility of ecumenical councils when and to the extent that they teach definitively and in union with the Pope; b) that such councils have definitively and with solemn, Papal approbation taught the doctrines of sanctifying grace, the Incarnation, and divine immutability; c) that these councils' infallibility implies the consistency of their pronouncements; d) that Rahner proves divine self-communication, in his distinctive sense of that term, indispensable to the mysteries of sanctifying grace, the Incarnation, and Christ's absolute saviorhood; e) that Rahner's views on divine self-communication cannot, therefore, conflict with the doctrine of divine immutability; and f) that any counterargument to his *Grundaxiom* that presupposes, as our first criticism does, that divine self-communication in the Rahnerian sense and divine immutability are incompatible must, consequently, be invalid; fails to nullify our first criticism, even in the context of a strictly immanent critique, because of the falsehood of premise d.

V. Conclusion

We have devoted this chapter to rehearsing and rebutting possible defenses of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* against the following counterargument, which we have referred to as our "first criticism." If God is simple, then every aspect of his being is

absolutely, albeit not necessarily relatively, identical with every other aspect. A self-communication on the part of a simple God which altered that God's being, consequently, would transform every aspect of that God, not excluding the Trinitarian relations, and thus guarantee that the Trinitarian relations as communicated would not correspond to the Trinitarian relations as eternal. Rahner's idea of self-communication, presupposing, as it does, becoming in a simple God, thus seems implicitly to contradict his famous axiom: "The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa."

After briefly verifying that Rahner does endorse divine simplicity, immutability, etc. and does insist that becoming penetrates God's very being, we turned to Bert van der Heijden's interpretation of Rahner's doctrine of God according to which the inner logic of Rahner's views concerning divine self-communication, on the whole if not in every detail, cohere rather well with the doctrine of divine immutability. In our review of Heijden's arguments, nonetheless, we discovered that he finds in Rahner a more systematic thinker than we or most of his interpreters have found him to be. Heijden, that is to say, tends to resolve the paradoxical and seemingly inconsistent aspects of Rahner's thought into a single, stringently consistent viewpoint: a viewpoint that frequently serves as a foil for Heijden's articulation of his own theological system. We found his interpretation of Rahner, accordingly, unreliable and of little use in vindicating Rahner from our first criticism.

Next, we turned to a complex argument, summarized in the previous section, from Rahner's belief in the infallibility of ecumenical councils when teaching definitively with the approbation of the Pope to the consistency of their definitive pronouncements and, therefore, to the consistency of Rahner's theory of divine self-communication with divine immutability if and to the extent that Rahner could establish the integrality of his theory of divine self-communication to some doctrine definitively authorized by an ecumenical council and ratified by the Pope. We found, moreover, that Rahner attempts to prove his ideas about divine self-communication integral to two such doctrines: viz. the doctrines of sanctifying grace and the Incarnation of the Logos. After reviewing and discussing Rahner's arguments at length, however, we found them inadequate to their purpose and concluded, accordingly, that the argument concerning conciliar authority does not invalidate our first criticism of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*.

In tandem with our second criticism, viz. that, even if an unmistakably Trinitarian structure manifested itself in the experience of divine self-communication, one could not, solely on the basis of one's experience, distinguish the novel from the permanent aspects of this structure if God changes when he communicates himself, then, it seems our first criticism weakens the credibility of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* considerably. It seems presumptuous, however, to declare Rahner's *Grundaxiom* and related theses positively disproved.

We think it advisable, therefore, to augment our two criticisms of the *Grundaxiom* and our brief animadversions on Rahner's Trinitarian interpretation of transcendental experience with additional counterarguments. In the following chapter, accordingly, we intend to argue: a) that Rahner's own canons of Trinitarian orthodoxy preclude the possibility of God's revealing the doctrine of the Trinity in the manner that Rahner proposes; and b) that the New Testament accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, if interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, entail conclusions incompatible with Rahner's own ideal of orthodox Trinitarianism.

Chapter 3: Further Criticisms

I. Introduction.

We devoted the first two chapters of this work, with the exception of the purely propaedeutic material in Chapter 1, to developing, and sustaining in the face of counterarguments, two basic criticisms of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*. First, we argued, Rahner guarantees at least some asymmetry between οἰκονομία and θεολογία by postulating the indispensability of divine becoming to any genuine divine self-communication. For if God is simple, as Rahner correctly assumes, then he cannot change any aspect of his being without simultaneously transforming every aspect of his being: the Trinitarian relations not excluded. If the divine persons, in order to become the economic Trinity, had to undergo such a metamorphosis, it seems, they would, perforce, differ, even in their mutual relations, from the immanent Trinity: i.e. the divine persons as they would have existed in the absence of a divine self-communication. Second, we observed, even if a mutable God could prevent the intra-Trinitarian relations from mutating in the act of self-communication, one who experienced this communication could not know, without simply being told through a verbal or at least conceptual revelation, that God had preserved his prior⁴⁷⁶ relational structure intact.

Having defended the first, and more cogent, criticism from possible counterarguments in the previous chapter, we hope in this chapter to proffer two further criticisms of Rahner's views on the revelation of the Trinity before resting our case against Rahner and introducing an alternative account. In this chapter, specifically, we hope: a) to show that Rahner conceives of the divine persons in such a way that they cannot manifest their existence *qua* distinct to wayfarers without resorting to verbal, or at least conceptual, forms of communication; and b) that the Biblical accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom* as Rahner understands it, entail conclusions

⁴⁷⁶ We employ this term in a logical and ontological, but not a temporal, sense.

incompatible with Rahner's Latin Trinitarianism. One can harmonize the *taxis* among the persons displayed in this event with a Western understanding of the intra-Trinitarian relations, we shall argue, only if one modifies one's understanding of what qualifies as correspondence between economy and theology to such an extent as to render the *Grundaxiom* powerless to perform its principal function: viz. warranting inferences from the economy of salvation to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

II. The impossibility of a non-verbal, non-conceptual revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity other than the beatific vision.

1. Introduction. The following four syllogisms seem to comprise a valid⁴⁷⁷ argument for the view that God could not inform human beings of the purely notional distinctions internal to his being without resorting to some verbal, or at least conceptual, revelation.

1. Every entity that possesses reality only through its identity with something else possesses no capacity for action insofar as it is distinct from this something else.
2. The divine persons are entities that possess reality only through their identity with the divine substance.
3. The divine persons possess no capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance.

1. Every entity that possesses no capacity for action insofar as it is distinct from a particular substance can impact nothing insofar as it is distinct from this substance.
2. The divine persons are entities that possess no capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance.

⁴⁷⁷ Not every valid argument, incidentally, yields a true conclusion. As Colin Allen and Michael Hand explain, "An argument is VALID if and only if it is necessary that *if* all its premises are true, its conclusions are true" (*Logic Primer* [Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001²], 1). "An argument is SOUND," by contrast, "if and only if it is valid and all its premises are true....It follows that all sound arguments have true conclusions" (*ibid.*, 2).

3. The divine persons can impact nothing insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance.

1. Every entity that can impact nothing cannot be known to exist from non-verbal and non-conceptual aspects of that which is other than itself.

2. The divine persons are entities that can impact nothing insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance.

3. The divine persons insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance cannot be known to exist from non-verbal and non-conceptual aspects of that which is other than they.

1. Every entity that cannot be known to exist from non-verbal and non-conceptual aspects of that which is other than itself, can be known to exist by other entities, if other entities can know that it exists at all, only through verbal, or at least conceptual, forms of communication or through direct intuition.

2. The divine persons insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance are entities that cannot be known to exist from non-verbal and non-conceptual aspects of that which is other than they.

3. The divine persons insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance can be known to exist by other entities, if other entities can know that they exist at all, only through verbal, or at least conceptual, forms of communication or through direct intuition.

The validity of the preceding, four syllogisms, each in *Darii*, seems indisputable. The major premises of the first, second, and third seem self-evident, moreover, and the minor premises of the second, third, and fourth consist in the conclusions of prior valid arguments. One who wished to prove the reasoning summarized in the four syllogisms above unsound, therefore, would likely focus any attacks on the minor premise of syllogism 1 and the major premise of syllogism 4. In the following, accordingly, we shall attempt to respond to objections Rahner either does, or could, oppose to these two premises.

2. Rahner's case against the minor premise of syllogism 1.

a. *What does Rahner actually believe?* One might think that Rahner would strenuously oppose the minor premise of syllogism 1, perhaps the most consequential premise of the entire argument. Rahner appears, however, explicitly to endorse it. After alluding to a related question, Rahner writes, "Catholic theologians do not agree on this point, but all agree that in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence."⁴⁷⁸ One could justifiably conclude, therefore, that Rahner cannot consistently dispute this precise point in our argument.

A defender of the *Grundaxiom*, however, might wish to argue that, at this juncture, Rahner implicitly deviates from one of his most strongly held beliefs, viz. that God does not possess an absolute subsistence; and that a consistent account of Rahner's overall position, therefore, would not include an endorsement of the first syllogism's minor premise. If the relations derive their reality, and, therefore, their subsistence, solely from the divine essence, such a person might argue, then the divine essence of itself must possess a subsistence, which the subsistence of each divine person presupposes and which, therefore, is not identical *simpliciter* with any of the divine persons: in other words, an absolute subsistence. Yet the absence of such a subsistence constitutes an indispensable presupposition of Rahner's belief that "in the New Testament ὁ θεός always *signifies* the First Person of the Trinity and does not merely stand for him often."⁴⁷⁹

A brief account of Rahner's argument for the identity of the Biblical ὁ θεός with God precisely as Father will show why Rahner's thesis stands or falls with his denial of the doctrine of an absolute subsistence. At the outset of Rahner's explicit inquiry into the question of "whether ὁ θεός not only *stands for* the Father, but also *signifies him*"⁴⁸⁰ in New Testament usage, he remarks, "it might seem that this question has already been decided in the negative"⁴⁸¹ for two reasons. The first, the only one that concerns us here, he summarizes as follows:

⁴⁷⁸ *Trinity*, 71; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 363.

⁴⁷⁹ "Theos in the New Testament," *TI* i, 126; "Theos im Neuen Testament," *SmtWk* iv, 386.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 130; *ebd.*, 388.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

It might be said that even in the New Testament ὁ θεός is used as a name for the object of natural knowledge of God; and this God is not the Father but the one God who is cause of the world in virtue of the numerical unity of his nature: this attribute, then, belongs equally to all three divine Persons, since all three possess the one nature.⁴⁸²

“But,” Rahner responds:

just this assertion—that what we know from the world is the Triune God in the unity of his nature, and not the Father—is open to question. It is obvious that the Father is not known *as* Father in natural theology, i.e. not *as* He who communicates his nature to the Son by an eternal generation....But we can still say that he who is in actual fact known from the world, is concretely the Father....For natural theology itself ascends not just to a divinity but to a God: it knows, that is, that this divine nature necessarily subsists....Unless we wish to follow Cajetan and Suarez, among others, in positing a *subsistentia absoluta* [then]..., only one course is open to us: to maintain that the concrete Absolute (*hic Deus*) known by natural theology is precisely the Father.⁴⁸³

Rahner’s argument that the Biblical usage of ὁ θεός as a name of the naturally knowable Creator does not necessarily falsify his claim that ὁ θεός refers *always* to the Father, then, amounts to the following instance of *modus tollendo ponens*.

1. Natural theology knows a God who subsists as unoriginate: either the Father who subsists relatively or the divine essence, which subsists absolutely.
2. The divine essence, however, possesses no absolute subsistence.
3. Natural theology, therefore, knows the God who subsists relatively as unoriginate, i.e. the Father.

If deprived of its second premise, this argument manifestly loses all validity. Now, Rahner’s identification of ὁ θεός with the Father greatly bolsters the Biblical basis for his claim that human beings can have distinct, non-appropriated relations to each of the divine persons, and this claim, in turn, constitutes an indispensable presupposition of Rahner’s *Grundaxiom*. One can, therefore, reasonably claim that Rahner’s virtual endorsement of the minor premise of syllogism 1, insofar as it

⁴⁸² Ibid., 132; ebd., 390.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 132-3; ebd., 390-1.

implies that God possesses an absolute subsistence and thus undermines Rahner's case for the identity of ὁ θεός with the Father, deviates from the main stream of Rahner's thought.

b. Difficulties for Rahner's position. One who wished to dispute the thesis, "in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence,"⁴⁸⁴ however, would face a daunting task for at least two reasons. First, the statement's most controversial implication, viz. that God possesses an absolute subsistence, appears to face no formidable difficulties. To the charge that an absolute subsistence in God would constitute a fourth, divine person, for instance, one can respond that no opposition of relation would distinguish such a subsistence from any of the three, divine persons, and "in God, all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes."⁴⁸⁵ To the complaint that the divine essence lacks the note of incommunicability and, therefore, lacks the proper *ratio* of subsistence, one can respond with David Coffey that the divine essence *does* possess the note of incommunicability in "that this essence cannot be communicated outside itself, that there cannot be more than one God."⁴⁸⁶

Coffey's response to this criticism, incidentally, strikes us as superior to the traditional strategy of distinguishing between: 1) an incomplete subsistence that consists solely in individuality, independence and the capacity for action, which one attributes to the divine essence; and 2) a complete subsistence that comprises these perfections as well as incommunicability to multiple *supposita*, which one ascribes to the divine persons.⁴⁸⁷ For, first, Coffey's solution in no way implicitly degrades the divine essence by hinting that the persons possess some perfection, viz., complete subsistence, which the divine essence lacks. Such a division of perfections between persons and essence, if made explicit, would reduce both the persons and the essence to imperfect parts of a greater whole which itself would lack the divine perfection of simplicity.

Coffey's response strikes us as the superior one, second, because it does not furtively suggest that the divine nature would grow in perfection, that it would attain

⁴⁸⁴ *Trinity*, 71; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 363.

⁴⁸⁵ DH 1330.

⁴⁸⁶ *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God [Deus Trinitas]* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 71.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Billuart, *Cursus Theologiae* 2, 101b.

“complete” subsistence, if only the three, eternal persons did not share this nature among themselves. No small part of the divine glory,⁴⁸⁸ in fact, consists precisely in the selfless sharing of the divine essence among the divine persons. In the words of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange:

The intimate life of God...is the supreme type of the life of charity. It consists of three totally spiritual persons who live by the same truth, by one and the same act of the mind; three persons who live by the same good, by one and the same act of love. Where do we find here the least trace of egotism? The ego is no more than a subsistent relation in respect of the one loved; He appropriates nothing more to Himself. The Father gives the whole of His nature to His Son, and the Father and the Son communicate the same to the Holy Spirit....Apart from the mutual relations of opposition between the persons, everything else is common and indivisible between them.⁴⁸⁹

Coffey’s perspective on the nature of subsistence, then, enables one to see that the self-sharing of the divine essence does not abrogate its absolute subsistence; it rather adorns it with the perfection of generosity.

Indeed, Coffey’s perspective also allows one to recognize the perfection of personality in the divine essence as such. In Coffey’s words, “as with subsistence..., so with person: in God there are one absolute person and three relative persons.”⁴⁹⁰ To the objection, moreover, that the divine essence lacks the capacity for action, another prerogative of subsistents, on the grounds that it is an abstract *id quo*, and *actiones sunt suppositorum*, one can answer with Aquinas:

Because *in divinis* the same thing is that by which and that which is, if any one of those things which are attributed to God in the abstract is considered in itself, other things being set aside, it will be something subsisting and, consequently, a person, since it is in an intellectual nature. As, therefore, personal properties having been posited in God, we now say three persons; thus, personal properties having been excluded by thought, the divine nature will remain in our consideration as subsisting and as a person [*STh* III, 3, 3 ad 1].

The divine simplicity will not allow one, therefore, to deprive the divine essence of a signal perfection like subsistence as long as one does not insist on incommunicability to distinct *supposita* as a *sine qua non* of subsistence. Even opponents of the idea of an absolute subsistence, therefore, ordinarily admit its

⁴⁸⁸ By “divine glory” in this context, we mean not the divine attribute, which, of course, has no parts, but the sum total of considerations that prove God to be intrinsically glorious and worthy of glory.

⁴⁸⁹ *God: His Existence and His Nature: Vol. II* (Bede Rose, tr.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1946), 182-3.

⁴⁹⁰ *Deus Trinitas*, 72.

material correctness and dispute it on purely terminological grounds. Hence Christian Pesch, for instance, a prominent opponent of the doctrine whose *Praelectiones Dogmaticae* Rahner studied as a seminarian,⁴⁹¹ admits that “this doctrine *quoad rem* is entirely true”⁴⁹² and objects merely to “a twofold inconvenience *quoad loquendi modum*.”⁴⁹³

Rahner, however, specifically professes to “disregard questions of terminology”⁴⁹⁴ in his polemic against the doctrine of absolute subsistence in “Theos in the New Testament.” He seems, therefore, to criticize the view that God possesses a *subsistentia absoluta* as not merely terminologically inapt, but substantially false. By assuming this radical stance, Rahner, of course, lends weight to arguments that the statement, “in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence,”⁴⁹⁵ diverges from the general thrust of Rahner’s thought. Rahner also, however, places himself in the inconvenient position of having to reconcile the absence of an absolute subsistence in God with God’s absolute infinity and unity.

As the Rahner of *Mysterium Salutis* recognizes:

Father, Son, and Spirit are only ‘relatively’ distinct; that is, in their distinction they should not be conceived as constituted by something which would mean a distinction previous to their mutual relations and serving as their foundation. For such a distinction, previous to the relations as such, would add something to the one divinity and thus do away with its absolute infinity and unity.⁴⁹⁶

In other words, the absolute infinity of the divine essence dictates that no entity in any way distinct from it can add to its already infinite being. It “follows...from the infinity of God,” writes Heinrich Hurter, “that he is incapable of increment.”⁴⁹⁷ The absolute unity of the divine essence, likewise, excludes the possibility of composition in God between a non-subsistent, divine substrate and a divine *suppositum* that

⁴⁹¹ In one of his later essays, Rahner reflects on the intellectual climate that prevailed “when I began my theological studies forty years ago” and refers to “Christian Pesch, whose manual of theology I followed” (“The Foundation of Belief Today,” *TI* xvi, 6, 7; “Glaubensbegründung heute,” *SzTh* xii, 21). He identifies this manual in a footnote as the *Praelectiones Dogmaticae* (ibid., 7, n. 10; ebd., 21, Anm. 10).

⁴⁹² *Praelectiones Dogmaticae: Tomus II: De Deo Uno Secundum Naturam: De Deo Trino Secundum Personas* (Fribourg: Herder, 1906³), §610, p. 325.

⁴⁹³ Ibid..

⁴⁹⁴ “Theos in the New Testament,” *TI* i, 133; “Theos im Neuen Testament,” *SmtWk* iv, 391.

⁴⁹⁵ *Trinity*, 71; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 363.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 68-9; ebd., 361.

⁴⁹⁷ *Theologia Specialis: Pars Prior: De Deo Uno et Trino, De Deo Creatore, et De Verbo Incarnato* (Innsbruck: Libreria Academica Wagneriana, 1885⁵), §41, p. 27.

bestows subsistence upon it: i.e. between divinity and God. As the Council of Rheims decreed against Gilbert de la Porrée: "We believe and confess that God is the simple nature of divinity, and that it cannot be denied in any Catholic sense that God is divinity, and divinity is God. Moreover, if it is said that God is...God by divinity,...we believe...that He is God only by that divinity which he is himself."⁴⁹⁸

In "Theos in the New Testament," however, Rahner seems to suggest that the divine essence, considered in abstraction from the divine persons, lacks the perfection of subsistence, and that the divine essence and persons, therefore, relate to each other as really distinct *quo* and *quod*. When Rahner, for instance, states that "natural theology...ascends not just to a divinity but to a God"⁴⁹⁹ and takes this as evidence that natural theology knows not only the divine essence but also the person of the Father, his words seem unintelligible on any other premise.

One could, of course, surmise that Rahner identifies the God of natural theology precisely with the Father, because only the Father subsists as absolutely unoriginate. Rahner's statements concerning "the necessity of an ἀρχή which is purely ἀναρχος,"⁵⁰⁰ and "an Unoriginate not just as set over against an origination by creation, but as opposed to *every* conceivable real and hypothetical origination,"⁵⁰¹ moreover, seem to lend credit to such an interpretation. Such an argument would seem to presuppose, however, that the divine essence in some way originates from the person of the Father; a conception expressly condemned by the IV Lateran Council in the words, "[the] divine nature...is neither generating, nor generated, nor proceeding."⁵⁰² Unless Rahner wishes to defy the authority of a general council, then, he must mean that natural theology traces all things back to the Father not because he alone is unoriginate, but because he alone subsists *a se* as unoriginate. Rahner seems to claim, then, that the divine essence lacks subsistence of itself and derives it from the Father as an *id quo* from an *id quod*.

⁴⁹⁸ PL 185, 617B-18A.

⁴⁹⁹ "Theos in the New Testament," *TI* i, 133; "Theos im Neuen Testament," *SmtWk* iv, 390-1.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 391.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

⁵⁰² DH 804.

c. Rahner's response.

i. Mystici Corporis. To the charge that he thereby contradicts the principle that God's infinite essence can receive no increment, Rahner seems to present no particular reply. To the charge that his teaching in this particular and others undermines the doctrine of divine simplicity, however, Rahner presents, in a different context, a sweeping answer. He takes his point of departure from a single line of Pius XII's encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*. In the section of this document that concerns the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Pius XII, affirms that "the conflict of various opinions and the clash of ideas"⁵⁰³ in this area of theology can serve the cause of truth and declares, "we do not censure those who enter upon diverse ways and methods of reasoning to understand...and to clarify the mystery."⁵⁰⁴ He, then, however, utters a stern warning to those engaged in controversy over the divine indwelling:

Let this be a general and unshaken truth, if they do not wish to wander from sound doctrine and the correct teaching of the Church: namely, that every kind of mystic union, by which the faithful in Christ in any way pass beyond the order of created things and wrongly enter among the divine, so that even a single attribute of the eternal Godhead can be predicated of these as their own, is to be entirely rejected. And, besides, let them hold this with a firm mind as most certain, that all activities in these matters are to be held as common to the Most Holy Trinity, *quatenus* they pertain to the same God as the supreme efficient cause.⁵⁰⁵

We have intentionally left the word "*quatenus*" untranslated, because, as Heribert Mühlen observes,⁵⁰⁶ it can bear both an explicative and a restrictive sense. If one interpreted *quatenus* here in its explicative sense, Mühlen explains,⁵⁰⁷ one would translate it with the word, "because," and understand Pius to identify the bestowal of grace with an act common to the three, divine persons, *because* God bestows grace through efficient causality alone. If one interpreted "*quatenus*" in its restrictive sense,

⁵⁰³ DB²⁷ 2290. Hünemann follows the post-Vatican II editions of Denzinger in omitting these words, along with those in the quote that follows, from DH.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid..

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.; DH 3814. Hünemann includes this text in DH with the exception of its first word, *Veruntamen*.

⁵⁰⁶ "Person und Appropriation: Zum Verständnis des Axioms: In Deo omnia sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis oppositio," *MThZ* 16 (1965), 37-57 at 38. Cf. Mühlen's *Der Heilige Geist als Person: In der Trinität, bei der Inkarnation, und im Gnadenbund: Ich—Du—Wir* (MBTh 26; Münster: Aschendorff, 1988⁵), §8.04, p. 243.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid..

however, one would translate it “to the extent that” and understand Pius’ statement as allowing for personally distinguished causality in grace *to the extent that* this involves something other than efficient causality.

Each interpretation has its merits. In defense of the first, one could note that, if Pius sincerely intended to allow for personally distinguished causality where efficient causality does not come into play, “*in tantum*,” or simply “*tantum*” would express his meaning much more clearly than “*quatenus*.” A partisan of the second interpretation, however, could rejoin that, if Pius desired to condemn the idea of personally distinguished causality in grace, “*quia*” or “*quoniam*,” and not “*quatenus*,” would seem the appropriate choice.

Likewise, a defender of the first interpretation could plausibly claim that it coheres better than the second with Pius’ warning against encroachments upon divine transcendence. If Pius intends “*quatenus*” in its explicative sense, he means to say that God influences human beings always through efficient causality and never through formal causality of any sort. This idea of divine causality, in keeping with Pius’ desire to uphold divine transcendence, erects a high barrier against excessively intimate understandings of God’s union with the justified in grace. If Pius intends “*quatenus*” in its restrictive sense, however, one could argue that he counteracts his own admonition by allowing that God could exercise formal causality on human beings in bestowing grace.

A partisan of the second interpretation could respond, nonetheless, that if Pius does intend “*quatenus*” in its explicative and not its restrictive sense, then he effectively nullifies his earlier expressions of tolerance for differing opinions on the subject of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The debates that raged at the time of the encyclical’s composition, such a person might argue, focused precisely on whether the divine persons always influence human beings through a strictly undivided, efficient causality or whether they might also exert some more intimate, personally distinguished causality in the order of grace. Pius XII’s explicit refusal to end controversy over these subjects thus makes it difficult to understand why he would condemn the very hypotheses that gave rise to the then current debates.

The evidence for the two perspectives on the meaning of *quatenus*, therefore, seems evenly balanced. Regardless of what Pius actually means, however, Rahner adheres very much to the second perspective. In fact, he seems to regard Pius’

statement as adequate warrant for qualifying radically the axiom, “the works of the Trinity are inseparable.”⁵⁰⁸ For, invoking no more than a single Denzinger reference to the relevant text of *Mystici Corporis*, Rahner writes in *Mysterium Salutis*, “The axiom is absolutely valid only where the ‘supreme efficient cause’ is concerned (DS 3814). Not-appropriated relations of a single person are possible when we have to do, not with an efficient causality, but with a quasi-formal self-communication of God.”⁵⁰⁹

A sentence, or, more accurately, a clause within a sentence, in an encyclical of Pius XII, in any event, hardly justifies Rahner’s conclusion that these axioms are “absolutely valid only where the ‘supreme efficient cause’ is concerned.”⁵¹⁰ Neither, then, can Rahner’s interpretation of Pius’ words aid in the effort to reconcile Rahner’s denial that God possesses an absolute subsistence with the doctrine of divine simplicity. As we noted earlier, Rahner does not defend himself against the charge that his views on this subject conflict with the doctrine of divine infinity. Two doctrines, then, those of divine simplicity and divine infinity, seem to falsify the thesis that the divine essence lacks subsistence of itself and derives its subsistence entirely from the divine persons.

Yet this thesis constitutes the sole argument in Rahner’s corpus, so far as we are aware, that directly contradicts our first syllogism’s minor premise: “the divine persons possess reality only through their identity with the divine substance.” It seems, then, that Rahner presents no sound argument against the first syllogism’s minor premise itself.

ii. Three alleged counterexamples.

α. Introduction. He does, however, offer three alleged counterexamples to the principle of the absolute inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra*, a central implication of the premise in question. If he established that exceptions really do exist to the principle that “*inseparabilia sunt opera Trinitatis*,”⁵¹¹ it seems that

⁵⁰⁸ DH 491, 535.

⁵⁰⁹ *Trinity*, 77; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 367.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*; *ibd.*

⁵¹¹ DH 491, 535.

Rahner would possess at least the beginnings of a sound argument against the minor premise of our first syllogism. If Rahner mounted such a case, then, it seems that it would take the form of the following two arguments, the first in *modus ponens* and the second in *modus tollens*:

1. If individual persons of the Trinity exert distinct influences in the world, then they must possess some capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance;
2. Individual persons of the Trinity do exert distinct influences in the world; therefore
3. Individual persons of the Trinity possess some capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance.

1. If the divine persons possess reality only through their identity with the divine substance, then they possess no capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance; yet
2. The divine persons do possess some capacity for action insofar as they are distinct from the divine substance; therefore
3. The divine persons do not possess reality only through their identity with the divine substance.

Neither of these syllogisms is invalid; the first premise of each seems self-evident; and the second premise of the second syllogism is identical to the conclusion of the first. One can cast reasonable doubt on Rahner's conclusion, therefore, only by challenging the second premise of his first syllogism: i.e. the claim that "individual persons of the Trinity do exert distinct influences in the world." As evidence for this claim, Rahner offers three alleged examples of a Trinitarian person's exercising such an influence: viz., the Incarnation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the justified, and the beatific vision. We intend in the following, accordingly, to show that in none of these cases can one conclude with certainty that the exercise of such a distinct influence actually occurs.

β. *The Incarnation.* Of his first example, the Incarnation, Rahner writes:

Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son. The second divine person, God's Logos, is man, and only he is man. Hence there is at least *one* "mission," *one* presence in the world, *one* reality of salvation history which is not merely appropriated to some divine person, but which is proper to him....This *one* case shows up as *false* the statement that there is nothing in salvation history, in the economy of salvation, which cannot equally be said of the triune God as a whole and of each person in particular. On the other hand, the following statement too is *false*: that a doctrine of the Trinity...can speak only of that which occurs within the Trinity itself.⁵¹²

In one sense, all of this is true; Scripture unquestionably requires one to hold that the Son alone, and neither the Father nor the Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, etc.. It seems, however, that one can reconcile to a certain extent the doctrine that the Logos alone constitutes the ontological subject who acts in Christ's human nature with the doctrine of the absolute inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra*.

The possibility of such a partial reconciliation appears from the following argument, which we derive principally from Aquinas. One may legitimately distinguish, Thomas reasons, between a human person and an individual, human nature. In his words, "not every individual in the genus of substance, even in a rational nature, has the *rationem personae*, but only that which exists *per se*: not, however, that which exists in another, more perfect thing. Hence a hand of Socrates, however much it is a kind of individual, yet it is not a person, because it does not exist *per se*, but in a certain more perfect thing, sc. in its whole" (*STh* III, 2, 2 ad 3). Because Scripture ascribes works performed through both of Christ's natures to the hypostasis of the Logos, moreover, one can reasonably assume that this hypostasis constitutes, in a certain sense at least, that "more perfect thing" in which Christ's human nature exists.⁵¹³ Expressions like "they...crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor

⁵¹² *Trinity*, 23; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 329.

⁵¹³ The relation of Christ's human nature to the hypostasis of the Logos differs from the relation of a hand to a human being, of course, in that: a) the hand constitutes a part of a larger individual nature, whereas Christ's human nature is an individual nature in its own right; and b) the hand, as long as it is attached to a larger human body, never attains the perfection of subsistence, properly speaking, whereas Christ's human nature, as united to the Logos does. Christ's human nature, that is to say, becomes an integral, subsistent being, and not merely a part of a subsistent being, by virtue of its relation to the Logos, as we shall see in the coming paragraphs.

2:8) and “you killed the Author of life” (Acts 3:15) seem scarcely intelligible on any other premise.

The idea that Christ’s humanity “exists in,” and is therefore incomplete without, the hypostasis of the Logos, however, generates something of an antinomy. For the datum of the incompleteness of Christ’s human nature without the Logos seems to imply that this nature, of itself, lacks at least one natural characteristic of humanity, viz. that of existing in oneself and not in some greater being. One cannot reasonably claim, however, that the “man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5)⁵¹⁴ who “had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect” (Heb 2:17) lacks any natural aspect of humanity. The revealed data, then, seem to require one both to affirm and to deny that Christ’s human nature subsists in itself.

The idea that Christ’s human nature is anhypostatic, or non-subsistent, in itself and yet enhypostatic, or subsistent, in the person of the Logos, however, seems to offer a solution to this dilemma. As John of Damascus explains:

Although there is neither an anhypostatic nature nor an impersonal essence...there is no necessity for natures united to each other in hypostasis to possess each a distinct hypostasis. For they can join in one hypostasis [so as] neither to be anhypostatic nor to have each a distinguishing hypostasis, but to have one and the same hypostasis. For the same hypostasis of the Logos, the hypostasis of both natures, a most singular hypostasis, neither allows one of them to be anhypostatic, nor, surely, allows them to have different hypostases from each other, nor at one time to have one and at another time another, but is always of both undividedly and inseparably the hypostasis, being neither distributed nor cloven, nor part of it allotted to one, part of it allotted to the other, but entirely of this and entirely of that indivisibly and integrally.⁵¹⁵

Divine revelation need not contradict itself, therefore, when it implies both that Christ’s human nature is incomplete without the Logos and that this nature possesses that subsistence, which naturally accrues to every individual, human nature. The two implications cohere if, and only if, the perfection of subsistence, a perfection that accrues to ordinary, individual, human natures simply on account of their humanity, accrues to Christ’s human nature by virtue of the hypostatic union alone.

A critic, of course, might object that the failure of Christ’s humanity to attain subsistence purely of itself seems to betoken some deficiency on its part. It seems,

⁵¹⁴ The NRSV rendering of ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς as “Christ Jesus, himself human” does not convey the salient point of this passage for our investigation: viz. that Jesus Christ does not merely possess a human nature, but is himself a subsistent human being.

⁵¹⁵ *Expositio Fidei* 53 in Kotter 2, 128.

nonetheless, that one could obviate this difficulty by postulating: 1) that God, by some supernatural intervention, inhibits Christ's human nature from attaining subsistence of itself; and 2) that Christ's human nature, in the absence of such inhibition, would develop subsistence without the aid of a hypostatic union.

The critic, however, could reply that since such a divine "inhibition" would be superfluous, one lacks sufficient grounds for postulating its occurrence. To this argument, it seems, one could respond by conceding that such inhibition would be superfluous if it were not necessary to the effecting of the hypostatic union. Christ's individual, human nature could hardly come to share in the hypostasis of the Logos, however, if it possessed its own, independent subsistence. Since Christ's human nature, as fully and perfectly human, would come to subsist in itself, just as any other particular, human nature, in the absence of some supernatural inhibition, then, such an inhibition does seem necessary to the accomplishment of the hypostatic union.⁵¹⁶

The Biblical account of Christ's ontological constitution, albeit frequently indirect, thus seems to dictate: a) that Christ's human nature does not subsist of itself, because God supernaturally inhibits it from subsisting in its own right, and; b) that Christ's human nature possesses that subsistence, which characterizes all individual, human natures, only through its union with the divine Logos. It follows, then, that one can determine at least one aspect of what union with the divine Logos adds to Christ's individual, human nature by determining what the perfection of subsistence adds to an individual nature as such. What differentiates a subsistent from a non-subsistent, individual nature, as we have seen, is that the first exists *per se* while the second exists in a greater whole. The rearward half of a worm, for example, does not subsist as long as the worm remains intact. Once one slices the worm in half, however, the rearward half begins to subsist.

Subsistence, then, seems to constitute nothing more than a terminus that distinguishes an individual nature from other beings of the same sort. Now, it seems that one could correctly, albeit analogically, describe the eternal Logos, insofar as he

⁵¹⁶ Commenting on a decretal according to which "the person of God consumed the person of man," Aquinas explains:

Consumption here does not import the destruction of anything that was before, but the impeding of that which otherwise would have been. For if the human nature had not been assumed by a divine person, the human nature would have had its proper personality; and to this extent the person is said to have consumed a person, admittedly improperly, because the divine person by his union impeded, that the human nature might not have a proper personality [*STh* III, 4, 2 ad 3].

is diverse from the Father and the Holy Spirit, as just such a terminus on the level of divine being. For, *qua* distinct, the Logos consists precisely in the relation of opposition that distinguishes him from the other divine persons.

It is, admittedly, impossible to demonstrate *a priori* that God can cause an individual human nature to terminate in a particular divine person in such a way as to subsist in this person without either disrupting the simplicity of the divine essence or so modifying the assumed nature as to render it inhuman. The inconceivability of such a proof, however, derives not from the intrinsic absurdity of the idea that God thus unites an individual human nature to the person of the Logos, but from the entitatively, and not merely modally, supernatural character of the hypostatic union. Christ's grace of union, that is to say, "exceeds the exigencies and powers of all created and creatable natures"⁵¹⁷ so that one cannot infer the possibility of God's bestowing such a grace *a maiori ad minorum* from his prior creative activity: whereas as one can, for instance, infer from God's creation of human bodies the possibility of his reconstituting those bodies in the general resurrection.⁵¹⁸ Nevertheless, one can reasonably infer the possibility of the hypostatic union from its actual, supernatural accomplishment. One can, therefore, rationally entertain the possibility of God's supernaturally inhibiting a particular human nature from terminating in a merely human subsistence and causing it, instead, to terminate in the divine subsistence of the eternal Logos.

If one can reasonably suspect that God might have accomplished the hypostatic union in this way, however, then, one can also reasonably suspect that "the coming of the Son into his flesh...presupposes neither on his part nor on the part of the Father nor the Holy Spirit any action or influence that pertains to him alone."⁵¹⁹ For, if the divine essence united Christ's particular, human nature to the Logos as to its term, then the Logos, insofar as it differs from the Father and the Holy Spirit, could constitute the ontological subject of that human nature without acting *qua* Logos at all.⁵²⁰ Christ's individual, human nature, in this event, would relate to the eternal

⁵¹⁷ Adolphe Tanquerey, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae Specialis* 1 (Paris: Desclée, 1913¹⁴), §863(b), p. 523.

⁵¹⁸ We derive our argument for the impossibility of proving *a priori* that God can bestow entitatively supernatural graces such as Christ's grace of union from Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's *The One God*, 336.

⁵¹⁹ Galtier, *L'Habitation*, 40.

⁵²⁰ As Aquinas explains, "assumption imports two things, sc. an act of assuming and a term of the assumption. The act of assuming...proceeds from the divine power that is common to the three

Logos as a line relates to its utmost extremity. It would terminate in the Logos, that is, and find in the Logos alone the completeness of a subsistent while suffering no more action from the Logos *qua* Logos than a line suffers from its terminal point.

It seems at least minimally plausible, then, that the divine persons, while exercising no personally distinguished causality whatsoever, could unite Christ's human nature to the Logos as to its term in such a way that the Logos becomes the ontological subject of that particular nature. As long as they maintained Christ's particular, human nature in this relationship to the Logos, in such a case, the Logos alone, as distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, would constitute the ontological subject of that nature. One can, therefore, conceive of a not evidently impossible scenario in which: a) one could truly affirm, for instance, that the Logos died on the cross; b) one could not truly affirm this, however, of the Father or of the Holy Spirit; and yet c) one could not truly deny that the divine persons always act inseparably. *Pace* Rahner, then, one can hold to the absolute inseparability of the divine acts *ad extra* without implicitly denying that the Son and the Son alone was born of Mary, suffered, died, and rose again in a particular, human nature. One can reasonably believe, although one cannot demonstrate, that the doctrines of the Incarnation and the inseparability of all divine acts *ad extra* do not necessarily conflict.

γ. *The indwelling of the Holy Spirit.* Rahner attempts to falsify the inseparability axiom, nonetheless, by offering a second, alleged counterexample: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit," Rahner writes, "dwells in us in a particular and proper way."⁵²¹ In a footnote, Rahner explains his position more precisely.

By this it is not of course meant that the Spirit alone makes his dwelling in us. Each person communicates himself and dwells in us in a way proper to him. And because the indwelling ascribed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture (as a power who sanctifies, consecrates, moves, etc.) corresponds precisely to the personal particularity of the Spirit and of his going forth from the Father and the Son, there is absolutely no objection to saying that in *this* way only the Spirit dwells in man.⁵²²

persons: but the term of assumption is a person....Therefore, that which is of action in assumption, is common to the three persons, but that which pertains to the *rationem termini* convenes precisely to one person,...[and] not to another" (*STh* III 3, 4 corp.).

⁵²¹ "Uncreated Grace," *TI* i, 345; "Ungeschaffene Gnade," *SzTh* i, 374.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, n. 2; *ebd.*, Anm. 2.

Neither here nor anywhere else in his corpus does Rahner supply specific, Biblical evidence for this thesis or refer his readers to the work of some exegete who does. While this may seem presumptuous on Rahner's part, it is also understandable; for little, if any, Biblical evidence exists for the view that the Holy Spirit performs any work *ad extra* without the aid of, or even in a different way than, the other Trinitarian persons.

The Holy Spirit, for instance, does unquestionably dwell in the justified (Num 27:18; Pr 1:23; Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-9; Hag 2:5; Zech 12:10; John 14:17; Acts 2:17-18; Rom 8:9, 11, 23; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Gal 4:6; Eph 1:13-14; 5:18; 1 Pet 4:14); but so do the Father (John 14:23; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:22; 1 John 4:12-13, 15-16) and the Son (John 6:56; 14:20, 23; 15:4; Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; Heb 3:6; 1 John 3:23-4; 2 John 2; Rev 3:20).

Scripture, then, plainly refers to the divine indwelling most often as the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not obvious, however, that Scripture regards the effects of the Spirit's actions in this regard as differing in the slightest from the effects wrought by the indwelling Father and Son. Rahner could, of course, point to other activities that one might wish to attribute in some distinctive way to the Holy Spirit. The Bible, for instance, states in the most emphatic terms that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the justified (Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 5:22-3; Eph 2:22; 3:16; 5:9; 2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2, 22). Yet it ascribes this function also to the Father (Lev 20:8; Ezek 37:28; John 17:17; Acts 15:9; 1 Thes 5:23; Jude 1, 24-5) and to the Son (Eph 5:26-7; 1 Thes 3:12-13; Heb 2:11; 10:14; 13:12) and differentiates the modes by which the persons accomplish the sanctification of believers only by, correctly, attributing the atonement to Christ alone. Suffice it to say that one can easily manifest the absence of differentiation between the divine persons' roles also in the raising of the dead and the inspiration of Scripture: the only other functions commonly proposed as in some sense "special" to the Holy Spirit.

Eduard Schweizer seems entirely justified, then, in concluding that, in the view of Paul, "Insofar as Christ is regarded in his significance for the community, in His powerful action upon it, he can be identified with the πνεῦμα."⁵²³ Prescinding from the Incarnation, moreover, the data adduced above also seem to favor Ulrich

⁵²³ "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός" III.1.d in *TDNT* 6, 422-4 at 423.

Mauser's judgment that "descriptions of the act of God and the act of Christ are, in Pauline theology, [so] often identical...that the conclusion is warranted that Paul considers them one single act."⁵²⁴ To the extent, then, that Paul's teaching on the salvation-historical functions of the divine persons mirrors that of Scripture as a whole, then, one can reasonably conclude that Scripture as such, prescinding from the Incarnation, seems to depict the acts in history of the Son as identical to those of the Spirit and the acts of the Father as identical to the acts of Christ.

Now, the principle of the transitivity of identity⁵²⁵ dictates that if the acts of the Holy Spirit are the same as those of the Son, prescinding from the Incarnation, and that the acts of Christ, prescinding from the Incarnation, are the same as those of the Father, then the acts of the Holy Spirit are the same as those of the Father. The conclusions reached above, when combined, thus amount to an exegetical warrant for the principle of the inseparability of all divine acts *ad extra*. The Bible, then, seems to teach not only that the Holy Spirit exerts no distinct effects in creation, but that none of the divine persons influences creation in his own, distinctive way. "There are varieties of gifts," writes Paul, "but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor 12:4-6). The glorious diversity of God's works notwithstanding, Scripture at least seems to suggest that they all proceed from one simple and indivisible principle of divine causality.

δ. The beatific vision. Nevertheless, Rahner offers a third and final alleged counterexample to the principle of the inseparability of all divine acts *ad extra*: the beatific vision. "If one supposes," Rahner writes:

that the immediate vision of God can only be based on a quasi-formal self-communication of God in vision, and not (adequately) on a created quality in the spirit of man; and if one recalls the obvious truth, that each of the divine persons is the object of immediate intuition in his personal propriety: then that entitative (ontic) quasi-formal self-communication of God, which takes the place of a *species impressa* as the ontological foundation of man's possession of God in knowledge, must include a non-appropriated relationship of each of the three divine persons to man.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ "One God and Trinitarian Language in the Letters of Paul," *HBT* 20 (1998), 99-108 at 106.

⁵²⁵ This principle, which is also sometimes referred to as "the principle of comparative identity," consists in the truism: if $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$. We shall argue in chapter 4 of this work that Scripture itself confirms this principle's validity.

⁵²⁶ "Nature and Grace," *TI* iv, 175; "Natur und Gnade," *SzTh* iv, 221.

In other words, Rahner argues:

1. If the divine persons do not communicate themselves to human beings quasi-formally, immediately, and distinctly, then human beings cannot know them immediately and distinctly; yet
2. Human beings do know the divine persons immediately and distinctly; therefore
3. The divine persons do communicate themselves quasi-formally, immediately, and distinctly.

In defense of this argument, one can justly observe that Rahner does not equivocate in his usage of terms, that his conclusion unquestionably follows from his premises, and that the minor premise of his argument is warranted by 1 John 3:2. The major premise of Rahner's argument, however, appears vulnerable to critique insofar as it presupposes an at least relative identity between human being and knowing. As we observed in the preceding chapter, Rahner's views on this subject seem contestable at best and, therefore, inadequate for the purpose of warranting further conclusions.

ε. Conclusion. It seems, then, that none of Rahner's three alleged counterexamples actually constitutes a certain exception to the axiom, "the works of the Trinity are inseparable."⁵²⁷ One cannot plausibly argue, therefore, from the falsehood of this axiom to the falsehood of the statement, "The divine persons possess reality only through their identity with the divine substance:" a statement that, if true, entails that the axiom in question admits of no exceptions. Rahner does not succeed, consequently, in blunting the force of the evidence adduced above in favor of the just quoted statement, which forms the minor premise in the first syllogism of our argument that Rahner's understanding of the divine persons' ontological constitution precludes the possibility of their revealing themselves in the manner he envisions.

⁵²⁷ DH 491, 535.

3. *Rahner's case against the major premise of syllogism 4.* The only other significantly vulnerable aspect of this argument, as we have already shown, is its fourth syllogism's major premise: "Those beings the existence of which cannot be inferred from non-verbal and non-conceptual aspects of that which is other than they can be known to exist by other beings, if other beings can know that they exist at all, only through verbal, or at least conceptual, forms of communication or through direct intuition." A proponent of Rahner's theology would presumably protest that such a statement gratuitously excludes the possibility that one might come to know of the divine persons by becoming one with them. The formulator of this premise, such a person would presumably argue, unwarrantably presupposes that a duality of subject and object necessarily characterizes the divine-human encounter: precisely the sort of duality that, in Rahner's view, divine self-communication always and everywhere overcomes.

Such a rebuttal would suffice to refute the major premise of syllogism 4, it seems, if it were certain that "being is knowing."⁵²⁸ For in that case, it would also seem reasonably certain that any radical, ontic, divine self-communication would necessarily manifest itself in its recipient's consciousness. In the preceding chapter, however, we established that Rahner's understanding of created being as relatively identical to created knowing is significantly problematic. The idea that divine self-communication is onto-logical thus appears insufficiently warranted to ground a compelling refutation of the major premise of syllogism 4.

4. *Conclusion.* Before concluding the dialogue with Rahner which we began in section II.1 over the possibility of a Trinitarian self-revelation through salvation history and/or transcendental experience, we would like to emphasize that we intend for the argument laid out in four syllogisms in the just-mentioned section to function as a strictly immanent criticism of Rahner's views on the revelation of the Trinity. As we have seen, Rahner admits that "in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence,"⁵²⁹ and characterizes this as the unanimous opinion of his communion's theologians. We have sought to prove, then, on the basis of a thesis which Rahner endorses without qualification, that God cannot reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings in the way in which Rahner envisions and

⁵²⁸ *HW*, 35; *Hörer*, *SmtWk* iv, 70.

⁵²⁹ *Trinity*, 71; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 363.

that Rahner's system, accordingly, to the extent that one can reasonably qualify Rahner's thought as systematic, is, in this area at least, self-refuting.

III. Christ's Anointing with the Holy Spirit as a Test Case for the *Grundaxiom*

1. *Introduction.* Heretofore in this chapter, we have argued that God cannot reveal the doctrine of the Trinity in the manner Rahner envisions. In our last argument against Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, however, we intend to grant, solely for the purpose of argument, this possibility. We intend to grant *in hypothesi*, that is, Rahner's contention that the salvation-historical functions associated with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Scripture are proper, rather than merely appropriated, to these persons. Acting in accord with this supposition, then, we hope to discern the pattern of inner-Trinitarian relations manifested in a significant episode within the economy of salvation: viz. Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit.

The pattern of relations among the persons in this episode of salvation history, we shall argue, diverges radically from the *taxis* among the Trinitarian persons as ordinarily understood by orthodox, Western Trinitarians, including Rahner himself. We intend to show, consequently, that if one consistently interprets the economy of salvation in accord with Rahner's principles and attempts to infer the doctrine of the Trinity purely therefrom, one will either: a) conclude to what Rahner correctly rejects as an unorthodox doctrine of the Trinity: or b) so modify one's understanding of the correspondence between economy and theology prescribed by the *Grundaxiom* as to render it impotent to warrant inferences from a non-verbal, non-intuitive revelation to conclusions about the immanent Trinity. This section, therefore, constitutes an attempt to refute *per reductionem ad absurdum* Rahner's thesis that the economic Trinity must correspond to the immanent Trinity in such a way as to warrant inferences from God's economic self-manifestation to the doctrine of the Trinity.

2. *Methodological considerations.* In keeping with our desire to mount an exclusively immanent critique of Rahner's position, it seems advisable, before proceeding to this final argument of our critique itself, to consider whether Rahner himself would find its presuppositions acceptable. We hope, therefore, to answer the

following three questions before proceeding to our main argument: viz. 1) Does Rahner consider Scripture a legitimate measure of the truth or falsehood of theological statements? 2) Does Scripture constitute an appropriate norm for the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner's theology of the Trinity? and 3. Does Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit constitute an appropriate matrix in which to test this axiom?

a. Does Rahner consider Scripture a legitimate measure of the truth or falsehood of theological statements? The appropriate answer to this first question will vary in accordance with the sense one attaches to the idea of a "legitimate measure" in theological questions. Rahner emphatically denies, in any event, that Scripture constitutes a "legitimate measure" for theological statements if by this one means that Scripture consists in a body of divinely revealed and, therefore, normative propositions. "It is apparent," Rahner writes, "that God does not effect revelation by simply adding new 'propositions' 'from outside' to the basic substance of the Christian faith....Revelation is not revelation of concepts, not the creation of new fundamental axioms [*Grundaxiome*], introduced in a final and fixed form into man's consciousness 'from outside' by some supra-historical transcendent cause."⁵³⁰ For Rahner the idea that "the transcendent God inseminates [*indoctriniere*] fixed and final propositions into the consciousness of the bearer of revelation"⁵³¹ constitutes matter for scorn, a thesis unworthy of serious consideration.

Rahner understands revelation in its most fundamental sense, rather, to consist in "a transcendental determination of man, constituted by that which we call grace and self-bestowal on God's part—in other words, his Pneuma."⁵³² This universal revelation constitutes, in Rahner's view, not a mere preamble to faith, but the deepest reality of the Christian faith. "The original one and unitive event of the definitive eschatological revelation in Christianity," Rahner writes, "is the one event of God's most authentic [*eigentlichsten*] self-communication, occurring everywhere in the world and in history in the Holy Spirit offered to every human being."⁵³³ This "one and unitive event," moreover, constitutes not an aspect, not even the most fundamental aspect, but the whole of Christian revelation. In his words, "the totality

⁵³⁰ "Historicity of Theology," *TI* ix, 67-8; "Geschichtlichkeit der Theologie," *SzTh* viii, 92-3.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 68; *ebd.*, 93.

⁵³² "On the Current Relationship between Philosophy and Theology," *TI* xiii, 61-79 at 62; "Zum heutigen Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie," *SzTh* x, 70-88 at 71.

⁵³³ "History of Dogma," *TI* xviii, 17; "Dogmengeschichte," *SzTh* xiii, 27.

of the Christian faith is in a real sense [*eigentlich*] already given in...transcendental experience."⁵³⁴

In Rahner's view, then, the Christian revelation constitutes a transcendental, universal, non-objective existential of concrete, human nature of which "the material contents of historical revelation"⁵³⁵ are mere "verbalized objectifications."⁵³⁶ They are, however, at least objectifications. Rahner treats such objectifications, moreover, as indispensable means to the self-realization of God's transcendental revelation, his "inner word of grace."⁵³⁷ In Rahner's words:

The external historical word expounds the inner one, brings it to the light of consciousness in the categories of human understanding, compels man definitely to take a decision with regard to the inner word, transposes the inner grace of man into the dimension of the community and renders it present there, makes possible the insertion of grace into the external, historical field of human life.⁵³⁸

In order for God's self-bestowal to reach beyond the transcendental sphere, beyond what Rahner calls the "fine point" (*Fünklein*)⁵³⁹ of the soul, then, verbal-historical objectifications, in Rahner's view, must explicitate it in the realm of the concrete and palpable.

The statements of Scripture, moreover, occupy, according to Rahner, a privileged place within the universe of objectifications, both religious and secular, in which human beings encounter divine revelation. For in Scripture, Rahner believes, Christians possess "the pure objectification of the divine, humanly incarnated truth."⁵⁴⁰ Rahner is even willing to say that "being a work of God it is absolutely [*schlechthin*] inerrant."⁵⁴¹

One would misunderstand this statement profoundly, of course, if one thought that Rahner meant thereby to affirm a traditional doctrine of Scripture. As we have

⁵³⁴ "Methodology," *TI* xi, 109; "Methode," *SzTh* ix, 122.

⁵³⁵ "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," *TI* xxi, 158; "Glaubensakt und Glaubensinhalt," *SzTh* xv, 158.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

⁵³⁷ "The Word and the Eucharist," *TI* iv, 253-86 at 259; "Wort und Eucharistie," *SzTh* iv, 313-55 at 319.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*, 320.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 258; *ebd.*, 319.

⁵⁴⁰ "Scripture and Theology," *TI* vi, 89-97 at 95; "Heilige Schrift und Theologie," *SzTh* vi, 111-120 at 118.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90; *ebd.*, 112. Cf. Rahner's similar remarks in "Heilige Schrift," *LThK*² in *SmtWk* xvii/i, 284-8 at 285 and his more tepid endorsement of Scriptural inerrancy in *Foundations*, 375-7 (*Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 355-6).

seen, Rahner considers “the history of revelation...co-extensive with the *spiritual history of mankind as such*”⁵⁴² and insists that the idea of inspiration be understood in such a way that it does not “*einen miraculösen Beigeschmack haben.*”⁵⁴³ On certain occasions, moreover, Rahner does not shrink from frankly disagreeing with Scripture’s literal sense.⁵⁴⁴ According to Rahner’s own standards, then, a few citations of Scripture can hardly suffice to undermine or to confirm a theological thesis: especially one of architectonic and hermeneutical significance such as the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner’s theology of the Trinity.

Rahner does, nonetheless, identify Scripture repeatedly as “the *norma non normata* for theology and for the Church.”⁵⁴⁵ It seems, therefore, that he could not reasonably object if one sought to evaluate elements of his thought in the light of Scripture, which he himself describes as “the inexhaustible source of all Christian theology, without which theology must become sterile”⁵⁴⁶ and “as it were, the soul of all theology.”⁵⁴⁷

b. Is Scripture an appropriate norm for the Grundaxiom of Rahner’s theology of the Trinity? One could argue, of course, that, although a Scripturally oriented,

⁵⁴² “Observations on the Concept of Revelation” in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (W. J. O’Hara, trans.; London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 9-25 at 16; “Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Offenbarung” in idem, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965), 11-24 at 16. Unlike O’Hara, we italicize the words “spiritual history of mankind as such,” because Rahner himself italicizes the words, “geistigen Geschichte der Menschheit überhaupt.”

⁵⁴³ “Buch Gottes,” *SzTh* xvi, 284. Joseph Donceel’s translation, “without recourse to the miraculous” (“Book of God,” *TI* xxii, 219), accurately conveys Rahner’s overall position, but misses the sense of this particular passage.

⁵⁴⁴ For instance, Rahner recognizes that Paul explicitly teaches monogenism in Acts 17:26 (“Mary’s Virginity,” *TI* xix, 218-31 at 225; “Jungfräulichkeit Marias,” *SzTh* xiii, 361-77 at 370) and yet rejects it. Likewise, Rahner refuses to consider Enoch and Elijah exceptions to the principle of the universality of death, Gen 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11 notwithstanding (“Christian Dying,” *TI* xviii, 238; “Das christliche Sterben,” *SzTh* xiii, 283).

⁵⁴⁵ “Scripture and Theology,” *TI* vi, 89-91, 95; “Heilige Schrift und Theologie,” *SzTh* vi, 118. Cf. also, e.g., “Dogmatic Statement,” *TI* v, 62 (“Dogmatische Aussage,” *SzTh* v, 77); “Schrift, Heilige Schrift,” *SM* iv in *SmtWk* xvii/ii, 1264-74 at 1266; and “Replik: Bemerkungen zu: Hans Küng, ‘Im Interesse der Sache,’” *StZ* 187 (1971), 145-60 at 159.

⁵⁴⁶ “Schriftbeweis,” *KThW*^I, *SmtWk* 17/1, 800.

⁵⁴⁷ *KThW*¹⁰, 376. Here Rahner quotes the II Vatican Council’s decree *Optatam Totius* 16 (Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Vol. II* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1990], 955). Rahner writes elsewhere, “It has often and rightly been said today that the study of scripture is the ‘soul of theology’” (“Reflections on the Contemporary Intellectual Formation of Future Priests,” *TI* vi, 113-38 at 133; “Über die theoretische Ausbildung künftiger Priester heute,” *SzTh* vi, 139-67 at 161). Again, remarking on “theology in general,” Rahner writes, “its ‘soul’ must be scripture, as Vatican II rightly says” (“Philosophising,” *TI* ix, 50; “Philosophieren,” *SzTh* viii, 75).

immanent critique may be feasible for other aspects of Rahner's theology, two factors render a simultaneously Scriptural and immanent critique of the *Grundaxiom* inconceivable. First, Rahner states that he formulates his theology of the Trinity, at least partially, in order to quell embarrassment over "the simple fact that in reality the Scriptures do *not explicitly* present a doctrine of the 'immanent Trinity' (even St. John's prologue is no such doctrine)."⁵⁴⁸ It might seem, therefore, that Rahner constructs his *Grundaxiom* with a view to liberating the theology of the Trinity from the Bible and setting it on a new foundation: in which case the idea of an immanent critique of this axiom that takes its departure precisely from the Bible would be unthinkable.

Second, one could argue that the critic who marshals Biblical texts in opposition to Rahner's *Grundaxiom* commits a category mistake. For such a person might seem to confuse the *Grundaxiom*, a principle that concerns how one ought to interpret Scripture, with a first-order assertion concerning a state of affairs with which similar assertions of Scripture may conflict. This sort of critique, of course, would manifest only the confusion of the critic, not any inadequacies of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*.

Serious grounds do exist, therefore, for denying the possibility of a simultaneously Scriptural and immanent critique of the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner's theology of the Trinity. To the immanent and Scriptural critique of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* attempted here, however, these considerations appear to pose no significant obstacle.

i. The relevance of the Bible to the theology of the Trinity. For, first, Rahner's belief that the Bible lacks an explicit doctrine of the immanent Trinity does not move him to unleash the doctrine of the Trinity entirely from its Biblical moorings. He seeks, instead, to anchor the doctrine of the immanent Trinity in the economy of salvation whose structure, in his view, appears pre-eminently within the narrative of Scripture.

Accordingly, Rahner states as one of the three principal goals of his theology of the Trinity, whose centerpiece is the *Grundaxiom*, that it "do justice [*unbefangener würdigen*] to the biblical statements concerning the economy of salvation and its threefold structure, and to the explicit biblical statements concerning the Father, the

⁵⁴⁸ *Trinity*, 22; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 328.

Son, and the Spirit.”⁵⁴⁹ Rahner, in fact, describes “salvation history, our experience of it, [and] its biblical expression”⁵⁵⁰ as “the foundation and the inexhaustible, ever richer starting point”⁵⁵¹ of human knowledge of the economic Trinity.

Though Rahner rarely treats exegetical questions, moreover, he does attempt in at least two instances to supply some exegetical basis for the idea that the Trinitarian persons perform distinct functions in salvation history, one of the essential presuppositions of the *Grundaxiom*. Specifically, he argues that “in Scripture the interior Trinity and the Trinity of the economy of salvation are seen and spoken of in themselves with such simultaneity [*zu sehr in einem*] that there would be no justification in itself (logically) for taking the expressions literally and substantially in the first case and only in an ‘appropriated’ way in the second.”⁵⁵² Likewise, Rahner devotes more than a third of his long essay, “Theos in the New Testament”⁵⁵³ to proving that in the New Testament the term ὁ θεός does not merely stand for often, but properly signifies, the intra-Trinitarian Father: a thesis by which Rahner seeks to bolster his case for ascribing distinctive influences in the economy of salvation to the Trinitarian persons. One cannot reasonably claim, therefore, that Rahner considers exegetical considerations simply irrelevant to arguments concerning the soundness and legitimacy of the *Grundaxiom*.

ii. *The hermeneutical character of the Grundaxiom.* Neither, it seems, does the hermeneutical character of the *Grundaxiom* render it insusceptible to every variety of Scriptural critique. For, although the *Grundaxiom* undoubtedly lies on a different plane than the statements of Scripture, it nonetheless admits of an indirect Scriptural trial. Even if one cannot, in the nature of the case, discover a straightforward correspondence or disparity between the statements of Scripture and the *Grundaxiom*, that is to say, one can test Rahner’s claim that the relations among the persons in the history of salvation mirror those described in the classical, Western doctrine of the immanent Trinity. To do so, one need merely to select a scene from Scripture in which the three persons appear in a salvation-historical context, discern the pattern of relations between them in this context, and measure this pattern against what one

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.; ebd..

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 82; ebd., 371.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.; ebd..

⁵⁵² “Uncreated Grace,” *TI* i, 346; “Ungeschaffene Gnade,” *SzTh* i, 375.

⁵⁵³ *TI* i, 79-148; *SmtWk* iv, 346-403.

knows of the immanent Trinity. If the two patterns correspond, this does not prove Rahner's axiom true, but it does lend it a degree of credibility. If the two patterns diverge, however, this indicates that Rahner's claims require qualification.

Someone might object, of course, that a disparity between the pattern of relations within the economy and the pattern depicted in the Western doctrine of the Trinity would not necessarily prove that *oikonomia* and *theologia* diverge. One could also take such a disparity as evidence of flaws within the Western doctrine. Since Rahner regards the doctrine of the Trinity taught by the IV Lateran Council and the Council of Florence, however, as a *donnée*, a disparity between the economic Trinity and the Western doctrine would, from his perspective at least, suffice to falsify the *Grundaxiom*. Even if the critique undertaken in this section, therefore, cannot, in and of itself, falsify the *Grundaxiom* in all of its possible acceptations, it can show that the *Grundaxiom* entails consequences that Rahner finds unacceptable.

A genuinely immanent critique of Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, which both respects its hermeneutical character and takes account of Scriptural data, consequently, is quite conceivable. One could reasonably challenge the legitimacy of the sort of critique attempted here, it seems, only on the grounds that it bases itself on inappropriate Biblical texts.

c. Is Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit an appropriate matrix within which to test Rahner's Grundaxiom? The texts on which our critique is based, viz. Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22; and John 1:32, moreover, do contain elements that might seem objectionable to Rahner. For God appears in these verses "at work palpably [*handgreiflich*] as an object (*Sache*) and not merely as a transcendent First Cause (*Ursache*):"⁵⁵⁴ as one who "operates and functions as an individual existent alongside of other existents...[as] a member as it were of the larger household of all reality."⁵⁵⁵ The Scriptural accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, that is, seem to portray precisely the God of whom Rahner says: "*that* God really does not exist,"⁵⁵⁶ and "anyone in search of such a God is searching for a false God."⁵⁵⁷ Insofar as these texts contain a supernaturalistic narrative of the sort that Rahner

⁵⁵⁴ "Science as a 'Confession'?" *TI* iii, 385-400 at 389; "Wissenschaft als 'Konfession'?" *SmtWk* xv, 171-83 at 174.

⁵⁵⁵ *Foundations*, 63; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 66.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; *ebd.*

specifically rejects as incredible, then, one could plausibly argue that Rahner would reject their normativity for the theology of the Trinity.

It would seem difficult to reconcile such an attitude, however, with Rahner's repeated and emphatic statements concerning Scripture's status as *norma non normata* for Christian theology. Rahner explicitly grants, moreover, that the expressions of Scripture "wholly retain their meaning even though the worldview on the basis and with the help of which they were once made has become obsolete."⁵⁵⁸ By declaring the idea of divine intervention at particular points in space and time incompatible with "our modern experience and interpretation of the world,"⁵⁵⁹ therefore, Rahner does not absolve himself from the responsibility to discern some meaning in each text of Scripture and to respect it as "the pure objectification of the divine, humanly incarnated truth."⁵⁶⁰

When Rahner states that he desires, in his theology of the Trinity, to "do justice [*unbefangener würdigen*] to the biblical statements concerning the economy of salvation and its threefold structure, and to the explicit biblical statements concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,"⁵⁶¹ furthermore, he seems to commit himself to taking seriously the Biblical narratives of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit. The thrust of Rahner's thought on these questions, therefore, suggests that these narratives, their supernaturalistic elements notwithstanding, ought to be treated as authentic witnesses to God's Trinitarian self-manifestation. These elements, consequently, do not pose an insurmountable obstacle to the simultaneously Scriptural and immanent critique proposed here.

3. *Reconciling the anointing accounts, when interpreted in accordance with the Grundaxiom, with Rahner's filioquism.* Those who: a) identify the Holy Spirit of the anointing accounts with the third person of the eternal Trinity; b) believe that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son as from a single principle; c) accept that the divine persons can effect distinct influences in the world; and d) accept the *Grundaxiom* of Rahner's theology of the Trinity; can account for the

⁵⁵⁸ "Science as a 'Confession'?" *TI* iii, 396; "Wissenschaft als 'Konfession'?" *SmtWk* xv, 180.

⁵⁵⁹ *Foundations*, 259; *Grundkurs*, *SmtWk* xxvi, 248.

⁵⁶⁰ "Scripture and Theology," *TI* vi, 95; "Heilige Schrift und Theologie," *SzTh* vi, 118.

⁵⁶¹ *Trinity*, 22; "Der dreifaltige Gott," *MS* ii, 328.

events portrayed in Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22; and John 1:32 in at least three ways. Such persons can:

1. claim that the Spirit is in some way involved in the begetting of the Son;
2. argue that the anointing accounts manifest a prior occurrence in which the missions and the processions correspond; or
3. conclude that the Spirit constitutes the Father's intra-Trinitarian gift to the Son.

In the following, we shall examine each of these interpretations with an eye to determining the extent to which they resolve the difficulty for Rahner's *Grundaxiom* posed by the anointing of the Son with the Holy Spirit.

a. Involvement of the Spirit in the begetting of the Son. "In the Biblical accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit," claims Thomas Weinandy:

a trinitarian pattern is clearly discernible. God's creative and prophetic word is always spoken in the power of the Spirit, and, as such, in light of the New Testament revelation, we have a clue to the inner life of the Trinity. The breath/spirit by which God speaks...his prophetic word throughout history is the same breath/Spirit by which he eternally breaths forth his Word/Son. As the Father commissioned Jesus by the power of his Spirit to recreate the world so, in the same Spirit, God eternally empowered him to be his Word.⁵⁶²

In Weinandy's view, then, "the...roles played by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [here and elsewhere] in the economy of salvation,...illustrate the...roles they play within the immanent Trinity, namely that the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶³

This view, whose supporters, alongside Weinandy, include Leonardo Boff,⁵⁶⁴ François-Xavier Durrwell,⁵⁶⁵ Edward Yarnold,⁵⁶⁶ and Gérard Remy,⁵⁶⁷ seems to

⁵⁶² *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 27.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁶⁴ *Trinity and Society* (Paul Burns, tr.; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 205, 207.

⁵⁶⁵ *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology* (Benedict Davies, trans.; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), esp. 141; *L'Esprit Saint de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1985²), esp. 155. Cf. also Durrwell's "Pour une christologie selon l'Esprit Saint," *NRT* 114 (1992), 653-77, esp. 661-5.

⁵⁶⁶ "The Trinitarian Implications of Luke and Acts," *HeyJ* 7 (1966), 18-32, esp. 19.

draw greater strength from Scripture's narratives of the virginal conception than from the accounts under consideration here. Each of these authors, however, appeals not only to the virginal conception, but also to the anointing accounts, to bolster his view.

i. Patristic precedents. Although the contemporary advocates of this position uniformly appeal to Rahner's *Grundaxiom* and thus present it in a distinctively modern cast, moreover, this view does not lack precursors in the earliest ages of the church. The idea of the Spirit as the breath that accompanies the Father's Word, for instance, appears explicitly in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa,⁵⁶⁸ Maximus the Confessor,⁵⁶⁹ and John of Damascus.⁵⁷⁰ One finds imagery patently suggestive of this view in the comparison of the Father, Spirit, and Son to Adam, Eve, and Seth: an analogy employed by Gregory of Nazianzus.⁵⁷¹ At least one orthodox Father, furthermore, explicitly endorses the idea that the Father begets the Son "in or by" the Spirit. Marius Victorinus, the Christian rhetor memorialized in Augustine's *Confessions*,⁵⁷² states in his *Adversus Arium* 1.58 that "He is not mistaken...who imagines that the Holy Spirit is the mother of Jesus, as well on high as here below."⁵⁷³

The idea that Christ derives from the Holy Spirit in some sense, furthermore, finds considerable support among various marginal groups of the first Christian centuries. The author of the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, for instance, seems to ascribe Christ's generation at least partially to the Holy Spirit. In a fragment preserved by Jerome, this author writes, "It came to pass now, when the Lord had ascended from the water, that the source of all holy Spirit both rested on him and said to him: my Son, in all prophets I was awaiting you, as coming, and I have rested on you. For are

⁵⁶⁷ "Une théologie pascale de l'Esprit Saint: À propos d'un ouvrage récent," *NRT* 112 (1990), 731-41, esp. 732-5.

⁵⁶⁸ *Oratio catechetica* 2; *Opera dogmatica minora, Pars IV* (Ekkehard Mühlenberg, ed.; GNO 3-IV; Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1996), 12.

⁵⁶⁹ *Quaestiones et Dubia* 34; PG 90, 814B. Ironically, in this context at least, Maximus uses the logical precedence of the *verbum cordis* over speech to explain why one cannot reasonably characterize Christ as the Son of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁷⁰ *Expositio fidei* 7; Kotter 2, 16.

⁵⁷¹ *Or.* 31.11; SC 250, 294-296; cf. John of Damascus' employment of this analogy in *Expositio Fidei* 8; Kotter 2, 23. Both Gregory and John, of course, employ this analogy in order to illustrate how the Holy Spirit can be consubstantial with the Father without either being begotten by him or being identical with him.

⁵⁷² 8.2.3-5.10; CCL 27, 114-19.

⁵⁷³ CSEL 83:1, 157.

my rest; you are my first-born son, who reigns everlastingly.”⁵⁷⁴ The author of the *Epistula Jacobi apocrypha* (6.20),⁵⁷⁵ likewise, depicts Christ identifying himself as “the son of the Holy Spirit;” and the author of the *Odes of Solomon*, portrays Christ as testifying that the Holy Spirit has “brought me forth [= begotten?] before the Lord’s face,”⁵⁷⁶ and that “according to the greatness of the Most High, so She [i.e. the Holy Spirit] made me.”⁵⁷⁷

ii. *Difficulties.* Motifs suggestive of the view that the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit, sc. that Christ proceeds eternally *a Patre Spirituque*, then, appear repeatedly, if not frequently, in the writings of the patristic period. The orthodox Fathers, nonetheless, almost universally reject this proposal for a rather obvious reason. The idea that Christ *qua* divine derives his being from the Holy Spirit seems to reverse the *taxis* of the Trinitarian persons revealed in the baptismal formula. As Basil explains, in the formula of orthodoxy he composed for Eustathius of Sebaste:

One must avoid those who confuse the order the Lord imparted to us, as men openly fighting against piety, who place the Son ahead of the Father and set the Holy Spirit before the Son. For it is one’s duty to maintain unchanged and unharmed the order that we received from the same discourse of the Lord, saying, “Go, teach all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” [Matt 28:19].⁵⁷⁸

Such reasoning, of course, seems unpersuasive from Rahner’s perspective, because Rahner: a) expresses doubts as to whether the baptismal formula actually derives from Jesus’ lips;⁵⁷⁹ and b) considers the Scriptural writers’ words mere objectifications of transcendental experience as mediated by salvation history. A second reason for rejecting a procession of Christ *a Patre Spirituque*, however, seems quite weighty given Rahner’s assumptions about the theology of the Trinity.

⁵⁷⁴ *Apud* Jerome, *Commentarius in Esaiam; Liber IV* at 11:1-3; CCL 73, 148.

⁵⁷⁵ *Epistula Jacobi apocrypha: Die zweite Schrift aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex I* (Dankwart Kirchner, ed., trans., and comm.; TU 136; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), 16.

⁵⁷⁶ 36:3; *The Odes of Solomon* (James H. Charlesworth, ed. and trans.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 126-7.

⁵⁷⁷ 36:5; *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ Basil, *Ep.* 125; *Saint Basile: Lettres: Tome II* (Yves Courtonne, ed. and tr.; CUFr; Paris: Les belles lettres, 1961), 34.

⁵⁷⁹ “New Testament,” *TI* v, 35; “Neues Testament,” *SzTh* v, 46.

This second reason consists simply in the datum that the Roman Catholic Church, in three councils which she considers ecumenical,⁵⁸⁰ has declared that the Holy Spirit derives his personal being from both the Father and the Son so that the Holy Spirit's very existence presupposes the personal constitution of the Son. In view of these decrees, which Rahner considers irreformable and infallibly true, then, it seems that Rahner cannot consistently affirm that the Son derives in any way from the Holy Spirit. If the anointing accounts, accordingly, when interpreted in accord with Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, imply an eternal origin of the Son from the Holy Spirit, then this *Grundaxiom* seems ultimately to undermine what Rahner considers orthodox, Western Trinitarianism.

b. The anointing accounts manifest a prior occurrence in which the missions and the processions correspond. A number of theologians, however, believe that they can transpose the pattern of interpersonal relations manifested in the Scriptural narratives of Christ's anointing into the immanent Trinity, as the *Grundaxiom* requires, without in any way contravening a thoroughgoing filioquism. Heribert Mühlen, for instance, attempts to resolve the dilemma posed by the anointing accounts by distinguishing sharply between Scripture's view of Christ's anointing and what he calls a "*dogmatic understanding*"⁵⁸¹ of this event.

i. Mühlen's dogmatic understanding of the anointing. "According to the statements of Holy Scripture," Mühlen writes:

the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit occurs at his baptism....For a dogmatic understanding [however],...one must say: Jesus possessed the fullness of the Spirit already from the first temporal moment of his existence. He is himself (together with the Father) the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit. He [thus] remains this origin of the Holy Spirit also as the Incarnate, so that also the Incarnate Son is never without the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸²

Mühlen follows Matthias Scheeben, then, in regarding the actual anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit, as opposed to its subsequent manifestation after Christ's

⁵⁸⁰ We refer to the IV Lateran Council (DH 800), II Lyons (DB²⁷ 460), and the Council of Florence (DH 1300, 1313).

⁵⁸¹ *Der Heilige Geist als Person*, § 7.12, p. 206.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*.

baptism, as at least temporally concurrent with the uniting of Christ's human nature with the Logos at the first moment of that nature's existence in Mary's womb. He does not, however, follow Scheeben in equating the unction, with which Christ's zygotic human nature was invisibly anointed, with "nothing less than the fullness of the divinity of the Logos, which is substantially joined to the humanity and dwells in it incarnate."⁵⁸³ Over against Scheeben, rather, Mühlen insists that:

in Scripture, in any event, a distinction is made between the man Jesus and the anointing that *comes* to him. In a mode similar to that by which the anointing comes to Jesus, in the early apostolic proclamation also the title "the Christ" [i.e. the anointed one] must be *added* to the proper name Jesus. The twelve proclaim Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42), for God has made the self-same Jesus, whom the Jews have crucified, Christ (χριστὸν ἐποίησεν, Acts 2:36).⁵⁸⁴

The Incarnation and the anointing differ, Mühlen explains, in that: a) the first effects the grace of union and the second the habitual grace of Christ; and b) the first is identical with the salvation-historical mission of the Son, while the second constitutes the mission *ad extra* of the Spirit. Now, Mühlen defines "mission," following Aquinas (*STh* Ia, 43, 2 ad 3), as an eternal procession with a temporal effect, or *terminus ad quem*, of the procession.⁵⁸⁵

Since the missions are not really distinct from the intra-Trinitarian processions, they naturally conform to these processions' order of origins: "the relation of the sender to the sent," Mühlen writes, "includes the inner-Trinitarian order of origins."⁵⁸⁶ By defining the anointing as the mission of the Holy Spirit, therefore, Mühlen supplies himself with a sure argument for the conformity of the persons' order of operations in the anointing with their order of procession in the immanent Trinity. Quoting Aquinas (*STh* IIIa, 7, 13 corp.), he writes, "The mission of the Son..., according to the order of nature, is prior to the mission of the Holy Spirit: as in the order of nature the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son."⁵⁸⁷

ii. *Grace and the person.* Mühlen does not confine himself, however, to this stipulative mode of argumentation. For he recognizes that, by identifying the

⁵⁸³ *The Mysteries of Christianity* (Cyril Vollert, tr.; St. Louis and London: Herder, 1946), 332.

⁵⁸⁴ *Der Heilige Geist als Person*, § 6.17.1, p. 184.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, § 7.10, p. 203.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, § 7.06, p. 201.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, § 7.13, p. 207.

temporal effects of the missions of the Son and Spirit, respectively, with the grace of union and habitual grace, he implies that Christ's grace of union logically precedes his human nature's habitual grace. If one could prove that Christ's habitual grace logically precedes the grace of union, therefore, one could falsify Mühlen's proof of the correspondence of the economic with the immanent Trinity in the event of Christ's anointing. If Mühlen could establish that the grace of union logically precedes the endowment of Christ's human nature with habitual grace, and could accomplish this without appealing to the definition of the persons' missions as "the free continuation of...[the intra-Trinitarian] processions *ad extra*,"⁵⁸⁸ however, he could at least corroborate his interpretation of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit.

Such corroboration lies ready to hand, Mühlen believes, in the following remark of Thomas:

A third reason for this order [i.e. for the precedence of the hypostatic union over Christ's endowment with habitual, sc. created, grace] can be derived from the end of grace. For it is ordained to acting well. Actions, however, are of *supposita* and individuals. Hence action, and consequently the grace that is ordained to it, presupposes an operating hypostasis. A hypostasis, however, is not presupposed in the human nature before the union...Therefore, the grace of union logically [*secundum intellectum*] precedes habitual grace [*STh* IIIa. 7, 13 corp.].⁵⁸⁹

Mühlen glosses:

According to...St. Thomas, the nature is that by which the agent acts (*principium quo*), whereas by the hypostasis or the *suppositum* the agent itself is meant (*principium quod agit*). The action is not possible without the *suppositum* which 'has' or 'bears' the nature. Insofar, now, as grace is ordained to acting well [*bene agere*], it presupposes the operating hypostasis. One can derive from this finding the universal principle: *GRACE PRESUPPOSES THE PERSON*.⁵⁹⁰

This principle, accordingly, dictates that the grace of union which personalizes Christ's human nature must enjoy at least a logical precedence over the endowment of that nature with habitual grace. Mühlen appears capable, therefore, of corroborating his interpretation of the anointing by means other than a stipulative and aprioristic appeal to the definition of "mission."

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., §7.10, p. 203.

⁵⁸⁹ Mühlen cites the passage in *ibid.*, § 7.22, pp. 212-13.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 213. The capitalization is Mühlen's.

It seems, in fact, that, at least for those who identify Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit with the bestowal of habitual grace on his human nature, Mühlen constructs quite a persuasive case for the correspondence of the immanent and the economic Trinity even in the difficult case of the anointing. Mühlen correlates the processions and the missions of the divine persons, moreover, in a way that resonates profoundly with certain patristic interpretations of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit.

iii. Patristic precedents. Athanasius, for instance, insists that Christ anoints his own human nature and that the Logos, as the second person of the divine Trinity, remains permanently the dispenser, and not the recipient, of the Holy Spirit. In Athanasius' words:

If, as our Lord declares, the Holy Spirit is his, if it receives of him and is sent by him, it cannot be conceived that the Word and Wisdom of God, as such, should receive an unction from that Spirit which he himself bestows. It was his flesh which was thus anointed, and he himself thus anointed it, and for this purpose, that the sanctification, which by this unction he conveyed to himself as man, might come to all men by him.⁵⁹¹

Cyril of Alexandria, likewise, speaks of how "the Son anointed his own temple"⁵⁹² and maintains that although "the Son is supplier of the Holy Spirit: for all things of the Father's are naturally in his power⁵⁹³,...he humanly received the Spirit among us...when he came down to us, not adding anything to himself insofar as he is understood to be God and Logos, but in himself principally as the chief of human nature introducing the Spirit of abounding joy."⁵⁹⁴

Like Mühlen, then, Athanasius and Cyril construe the anointing accounts in such a way that they reflect the order of persons revealed in the baptismal formula. In at least one respect, however, Mühlen's interpretation of Christ's anointing seems to excel these explanations of Athanasius and Cyril in clarity and accuracy. Cyril and

⁵⁹¹ *Contra Arianos* 3.47; PG 26, 109C.

⁵⁹² *In Joannis Evangelium. Liber XI* at John 17:19; PG 74, 549D. In John 17:19, of course, Jesus says: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

⁵⁹³ Cyril presumably alludes to Christ's words in John 16:15a: "All that the Father has is mine."

⁵⁹⁴ *In Ps. 44[45]:8*; PG 69, 1040A. Cyril frequently emphasizes that Christ receives the Holy Spirit as man, not as God. Cf., e.g., *In Lucam* 3:22; PG 72:524D, *In Isaiam. Liber III. Tomus V*; PG 70, 849D and 852A, *De recte fide ad reginas*, XIII; PG 76, 1220D-1221A, and *Comm. In Joelem Prophetam* XXXV; PG 71, 377D and 380A.

Athanasius, in the passages just quoted, tend to downplay, if not entirely to ignore, the personal character of Christ's human nature insofar as it subsists in the eternal Logos. Mühlen, by contrast, admits and even accentuates this aspect of the mystery of Christ's anointing. "The Holy Spirit," Mühlen writes, "is sent to the already, in the sense of logical priority, personalized human nature of Jesus! From this point of view the sending of the Holy Spirit *ad extra* includes not a relation of person to nature as the sending of the Son does, but a *relation of person to person*."⁵⁹⁵

iv. Difficulties. Mühlen correctly notes, that is to say, that, by virtue of the grace of union, Christ's human nature subsists as personal in the Logos before, in the sense of logical priority, the Holy Spirit endows it with habitual grace so that, when the Holy Spirit does so endow this nature, he acts not merely on a created nature, but on the person of the eternal Word. Now, although Mühlen himself underlines this aspect of the mystery, it constitutes a considerable difficulty for Mühlen's attempt to harmonize the anointing accounts with Rahner's ideas about the immanent and the economic Trinity.

For, according to Rahner's filioquist theology of the immanent Trinity, the Holy Spirit receives his personal being from the Father and the Son and is identical with his receptive relation to these two persons: a relation customarily termed "passive spiration." The Father and the Son, correspondingly are identical, albeit each in his own way, with the relation of active spiration: a relation that does not constitute a person of itself, because it involves no opposition of relation between the two already, in the logical sense, existing *spiratores*. The Father and the Son, as relative to the Spirit, therefore, are pure activity; and the Holy Spirit, as relative to them, is pure reception.

Now, the idea that the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit consists in the bestowal of habitual grace on the Logos suggests that, in the economy of salvation, the Son and the Spirit invert their relations; the eternal giver receives, and the eternal receiver gives. Mühlen ameliorates this problem, of course, by holding that the Son anoints himself, but he does not eliminate it. For even in the event that the Son anointed himself with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit would still influence not an impersonal nature, but, as Mühlen rightly insists, the very person of the eternal Word.

⁵⁹⁵ Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist*, §7.13, p. 207.

Mühlen's best efforts notwithstanding, then, the pattern of mutual relations the divine persons manifest in the incident of the anointing still diverges from the pattern of the immanent Trinity. Mühlen ultimately does not succeed in his attempt to reconcile the Scriptural narratives of Christ's anointing, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, to Rahner's presuppositions concerning the theology of the Trinity.

c. The Spirit as intra-Trinitarian gift of the Father to the Son. The hypotheses considered thus far, however, by no means exhaust the range of options available to theologians desiring to resolve the dilemmas generated by the anointing accounts for Rahner's theology of the Trinity. François Bourassa⁵⁹⁶ and Guy Vandeveld-Daillière,⁵⁹⁷ for instance, attempt to harmonize the accounts of Christ's anointing, considered as a revelation of the intra-Trinitarian relations, with a filioquist understanding of the immanent Trinity by conceiving of the Holy Spirit as the intra-Trinitarian gift of the Father to the Son. Bourassa writes, accordingly:

"It is without measure that God *gives* the Spirit; the Father loves the Son and has *given* all to him" (John 3:34-5). The principal meaning of this revelation is that of the baptismal theophany: the constitution of *Christ*, of the man Jesus, in the dignity of the *Son of God*, object of the Father's pleasure in the Spirit of sanctification (Rom 1:4). But theology is justly unanimous: the mission is the procession of the person, the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, the Incarnation in a global sense, sc. the whole existence of the Son in the flesh, is the revelation of the "only begotten in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). Thus the Spirit is, above all, in the interior of the Trinity, "the gift of God," sc. the Gift of the Father to the Son "before the creation of the world," in whom the Father has given him all, giving *himself* to him, by engendering him as his only Son, in the effusion of his Love for him.⁵⁹⁸

According to François Bourassa, then, "The Son himself is constituted eternally Son of God 'in the bosom of the Father' in that the Father communicates to him his plenitude in the gift of the Spirit;"⁵⁹⁹ and one can infer this from the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. esp. Bourassa's essay "Le Don de Dieu," in his *Questions de Théologie Trinitaire* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1970), 191-238.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Vandeveld-Daillière's "L'«inversion trinitaire» chez H.U. von Balthasar," *NRT* 120 (1998), 370-83.

⁵⁹⁸ "Le Don de Dieu," 212.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*.

i. The identity of active spiration and active filiation. This view appears, of course, to conflict with filioquism, as Bourassa frankly admits. “If the Spirit is the gift of the Father to the Son *in generation*,” he writes, “it seems, then, that generation takes place through the Spirit or in virtue of the Spirit. The Spirit is, therefore, the principle of the generation of the Son, whereas, according to the most firm facts of dogma, the generation of the Son is the principle of the procession of the Spirit.”⁶⁰⁰

Bourassa, nevertheless, considers this conflict merely apparent. For, the principle, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes,”⁶⁰¹ implies that the Father and the Son spirate the Spirit *tamquam ab uno principio*; and the unity of the Father and Son as the single principle of the Spirit’s procession, furthermore, implies that the Father’s eternal generation of the Son is not really distinct from his eternal spiration of the Holy Spirit. Active filiation, in other words, is not really distinct from active spiration.

The identity of both the Son and the Father with active spiration, moreover, implies that the person-constituting relation of the Son, viz. passive filiation, which the Father bestows on him by generating him, is also identical with active spiration. Bourassa concludes, therefore, that “as in generating the Son..., the Father communicates to him all of his substance,..., he communicates to him also to be with him *source jaillissante de l’Esprit*.”⁶⁰² This last datum entails, in Bourassa’s view, the central point of his argument: that just as the Holy Spirit appears as the gift of the Father to Jesus in the economy of salvation, so for all eternity the Father pours out the Holy Spirit on his immanent Word.

ii. The Holy Spirit as medius nexus of the Father and the Son. Bourassa recognizes, of course, that some might find his inference less than obvious; to bestow on the Son the capacity to share in active spiration is not at all to bestow on him passive spiration, the person-constituting relation of the Holy Spirit, which active spiration logically precedes. “Here,” writes Bourassa, “the objection arises anew. Must one not then suppose the Spirit to be anterior to the Son, or...possessed anteriorly by the Father, or proceeding anteriorly from him in order to be given to the

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁰¹ DH 1330

⁶⁰² “Le Don de Dieu,” 229.

Son...?"⁶⁰³ In answer to this criticism, Bourassa refers the reader to Aquinas' *STh* Ia. 37, 1 ad 3 in which Thomas writes:

The Holy Spirit is said to be the *nexus* of the Father and Son inasmuch as he is Love, because since the Father loves himself and the Son in a single dilection and *e converso*, the habit of the Father to the Son and *e converso* as lover to beloved is brought about [*importatur*] in the Holy Spirit as love. Yet from this very thing, that the Father and the Son love each other mutually, it must be that the mutual Love, who is the Holy Spirit, proceeds from both. According to origin, therefore, the Holy Spirit is not a medium, but the third person in the Trinity; according to the aforementioned habit [however], he is the *medius nexus* of the two, proceeding from both.

Now, Bourassa argues, one can draw a merely rational distinction between the Father's active spiration and his notional love for the Son, just as one can distinguish rationally between active filiation and active spiration. Yet, in the pristine simplicity of the Godhead, the Father's notional act of loving the Son and his notional act of generating the Son are really identical. Bourassa holds, accordingly, that if one prescind from the question of origin and attends rather to the "order of circumincession," then one can reasonably say that the Father generates the Son through the Holy Spirit just as one can say that the Father generates the Son through his love for him.

Bourassa explicitly grants, then, that, according to the order of origin, the Father does not generate the Son by bestowing upon him the Holy Spirit. "According to the order of origin," Bourassa writes, "the Holy Spirit is the *third* person of the Trinity, but according to the circum-incession of the Father and the Son, the Spirit, being their communion of love (*koinonia*), is *intermediary* between the two."⁶⁰⁴ With the aid of his distinction between the order of origin and the order of circumincession, therefore, Bourassa might seem finally to succeed in transposing the divine persons' relations in the anointing into the immanent Trinity, as Rahner's *Grundaxiom* requires, without compromising the filioquist understanding of the immanent Trinity which he and Rahner share.

iii. Difficulties. Two difficulties, however, call Bourassa's solution into question. First, it might seem that Rahner denies the possibility of mutual love among the

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 230.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 231.

persons of the Trinity. For, in his tractate on the Trinity in *Mysterium Salutis*, Rahner explicitly states that “there is not actually a *mutual* (presupposing two acts) love between the Father and the Son,”⁶⁰⁵ and, indeed, that “within the Trinity there is no reciprocal ‘Thou.’”⁶⁰⁶ Second, one could plausibly argue that the Holy Spirit as such does not actually constitute a *medius nexus* between the Father and the Son. For, as Aquinas explains in *STh* Ia, 37, 2 corp., the Father loves the Son “by” the Holy Spirit not because the Holy Spirit constitutes the means whereby the Father performs this notional act, but because the Father’s notional act of loving the Son effects the Holy Spirit’s existence as a distinct, divine person. In Thomas’ words:

Since things are commonly denominated from their forms, thus a white thing from whiteness and a human being from humanity, everything from which something is named has to this extent the habit of a form....Now, instances exist in which something is named through that which proceeds from it,...[i.e.] even from the term of its action, which is the effect, when this effect is included in the understanding of the action. We say, for instance,...that a tree flowers by its flowers, although the flowers are not the form of the tree, but a certain effect proceeding from it...[Now] truly, as it is taken notionally, to love is nothing other than to spirate love....As, therefore, a tree is said to flower by its flowers, so...the Father and the Son are said to love each other and us by the Holy Spirit or Love proceeding.

Aquinas, then, thinks that one can truthfully assert that the Father loves the Son by the Holy Spirit only to the extent that the Holy Spirit constitutes the effect of his notional love, i.e. active spiration. Now, since active spiration: a) is the means by which the Father loves the Son; and b) is also the act in which the Father and Son unite so as to form a single principle of the Holy Spirit; it might seem c) that active spiration constitutes the bond that draws the Father and Son together, and not the Holy Spirit, which appears rather as the effect of active spiration’s unitive power.

iv. Responses. The adequacy of Bourassa’s interpretation of the anointing accounts, at least for the purpose of obviating the difficulties they pose for Rahner’s theology of the Trinity, thus appears somewhat doubtful. The first difficulty, however, and, to a lesser degree, the second, appear quite surmountable. In order to refute the first charge, specifically, one need only note that Rahner explicitly affirms

⁶⁰⁵ *Trinity*, 106; “Der dreifaltige Gott,” *MS* ii, 387. We modify Donceel’s translation here significantly. Rahner’s German reads: “es nicht eigentlich eine *gegenseitige* (zwei Akte voraussetzende) Liebe zwischen Vater und Sohn.”

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 76, n. 30; *ibid.*, 366, Anm. 29.

that the Holy Spirit does constitute the mutual love of the Father and the Son. In summarizing magisterial teaching on the subject, he affirms, without qualification, that the Holy Spirit's "'procession' is only cautiously indicated, although as such it is defined (*bestimmt*) as the procession of the mutual love of Father and Son."⁶⁰⁷

The two passages cited above as evidence for Rahner's opposition to this tenet, moreover, prove nothing of the sort. For, in the first passage, in which Rahner writes, "there is not actually a *mutual* (presupposing two acts) love between the Father and the Son," Rahner expressly excludes only a mutual love that would require of the Father and Son individually distinguished notional acts of love as opposed to their common act of notional love, active spiration. Likewise, when he denies the existence of a "mutual Thou" in the Trinity, Rahner seems to deny only the existence of distinct subjectivities who know each other through their own exclusive consciousnesses. For Rahner affirms in the same context that each Trinitarian person constitutes a "distinct subject in a rational nature"⁶⁰⁸ and approvingly quotes Lonergan in the same work to the effect that "the three subjects are aware of each other through one consciousness which is possessed in a different way by the three of them."⁶⁰⁹ It seems, then, that instead of preemptorily excluding the doctrine that identifies the Holy Spirit as the Father and Son's mutual love, Rahner explicitly endorses both the doctrine and its ontological presuppositions.

The second difficulty, viz. the charge that active spiration, instead of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the *medius nexus* of the first two Trinitarian persons, seems somewhat more imposing. One can plausibly argue, however, that this objection rests on a false dichotomy. Even if, that is to say, active spiration serves as a unitive bond in a much stricter sense than the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit may still qualify as the *medius nexus* of the Father and Son in some less rigorous acceptation of the term. For, first, as Aquinas suggests, the Father and the Son do love each other "by" the Holy Spirit in the same sense as a tree flowers "by" its flowers so that one can reasonably characterize the Holy Spirit as the *forma* by which the Father and Son love each other, albeit in a highly attenuated sense. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the Holy Spirit does constitute the *raison d'être* of active spiration so that, in the order of intentions if not in the order of execution, it takes precedence over active spiration as the more ultimate cause of the Father and Son's unity in their

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 67; ebd., 360.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 75, n. 29; ebd., 366, Anm. 28.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 107, n. 29; ebd., 387, Anm. 29.

act of notional love. It seems, therefore, that one can do justice to the concerns of the second objection without categorically rejecting Bourassa's identification of the Holy Spirit with the *medius nexus* of Father and Son. Apparently, then, Bourassa succeeds in proving that the economic Trinity corresponds to the immanent Trinity, as understood in orthodox Latin Trinitarianism, even in the difficult case of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit.

v. *The order of circumincession and human knowledge of the Trinity.* Bourassa succeeds in interpreting the anointing in such a way that it undermines neither the *Grundaxiom* nor Latin Trinitarianism, however, only at the expense of de-functionalizing the *Grundaxiom*. If the economy of salvation, that is to say, presupposes not one, but two intra-Trinitarian *taxeis*, then the *Grundaxiom* does not suffice to warrant an inference from the economy of salvation, unaccompanied by a verbal revelation, to any particular doctrine of the immanent Trinity. For if two intra-Trinitarian *taxeis* co-existed, then human beings, possessing neither a verbal revelation nor the beatific vision, would be incapable of determining which *taxis* a particular economic manifestation of the immanent Trinity revealed.

If two intra-Trinitarian *taxeis* co-existed, moreover, the divine persons' roles in the economy of salvation would convey no sure information about the Trinity's eternal constitution. For if the economic Trinity corresponded to the immanent Trinity even if the divine persons' operations occurred in the order, Father—Spirit—Son, or, perhaps, Spirit—Son—Father,⁶¹⁰ then the *Grundaxiom* would allow for a sending of the Son by the Holy Spirit or, for that matter, an incarnation of the Holy Spirit or even the Father. Now, given Rahner's presupposition that verbal revelation simply does not occur, the very idea that such things could happen would, in Rahner's words:

wreak havoc with theology. There would no longer be any connection between "mission" and the intra-Trinitarian life. Our sonship in grace would in fact have absolutely nothing to do with the Son's sonship, since it might equally well be brought about without any modification by another incarnate

⁶¹⁰ Such would be the order if one considered the persons: a) insofar as they are constituted by the processions; and b) according to the order of intention so that the Holy Spirit, as the τέλος of the processions, would appear first; the Son, as the mediate term of the processions, would appear second; and the Father, as the ultimate origin of the processions, would appear last.

person. That which God is for us would tell us absolutely nothing about that which he is in himself, as triune.⁶¹¹

Yet, if an order of circumincession exists in the immanent Trinity alongside the order of origin, and a correspondence of the persons' order of operations to either order fulfills the requirements of the *Grundaxiom*, then an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, a pouring out of the Son at Pentecost, etc. not only could occur, but could occur without contravening the *Grundaxiom*. Bourassa's harmonization of Rahner's *Grundaxiom* and the Biblical anointing accounts thus renders the axiom ineffectual for the purpose of deriving the doctrine of the Trinity from an economy of salvation unilluminated by verbal revelation.

d. Conclusion. The alternatives to Bourassa's harmonization which we have surveyed, however, do not succeed in reconciling Christ's anointing, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, with Latin Trinitarianism. If, then, a) one prescind from the possibility that another, more palatable solution exists to the difficulties the anointing poses for Rahner's views on the Trinity; and b) one regards the central tenets of Latin Trinitarianism as *données* as, in the context of an immanent critique of Rahner's position, one ought; then, it seems, one cannot but conclude that the *Grundaxiom* is either useless, at least for the purposes to which Rahner puts it, or false.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 30; ebd., 333.

IV. Outlook

In this, the final chapter of the first part of our work, we have argued: 1) that certain of Rahner's presuppositions, and especially his belief that "in God the relation is real only through its identity with the real divine essence,"⁶¹² imply that God cannot reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings in the manner that Rahner proposes; and 2) that one can reconcile the Biblical accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, with Latin Trinitarianism only if one posits the existence of multiple *taxeis* in the inner-Trinitarian life and thereby strips the *Grundaxiom* of its power to warrant inferences from the divine acts in the economy of salvation to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. These arguments, along with those advanced in the first two chapters, suffice, in our view, to establish the improbability of Rahner's views as to how God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity.

It remains, therefore, for us to present some more plausible alternative understanding of the means whereby God endows at least certain human beings with the prerequisites for warranted belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. In chapter 4, our final chapter, accordingly, we shall seek to establish that the Bible at least implicitly teaches the principal tenets of orthodox, Latin Trinitarianism by an argument whose principal constituents include: 1) a discussion of the meaning of $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ in the context of Phil 2:6-7 and; 2) a less directly exegetical derivation of the axiom, "In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes." We do not, we should like to emphasize, intend to conform our arguments to an unattainable, quasi-mathematical standard of precision and certainty. It behooves us, however, after discrediting Rahner's paradigm for the revelation of the Trinity, to supply some reasonable alternative.

⁶¹² Ibid., 71; ebd., 363.

Part Two

An Evangelical Alternative

Chapter 4: Scriptural Foundations for the Doctrine of the Trinity

I. Introduction

“The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each individual of these is God, and at the same time all are one God....The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; [and] the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.”⁶¹³ Thus Augustine summarizes the doctrine of the Trinity in its most elementary form. In the following, we shall presuppose: a) the plenary, verbal inspiration, the sufficiency, the perspicuity, and the inerrancy of all 66 books of the Protestant, Biblical canon and only those books; and b) seek to warrant, on the basis of these books’ teaching alone, the doctrines of Christ’s deity and of the Holy Spirit’s distinct personality. Christ’s distinct personality and the Spirit’s deity, we shall assume, are sufficiently manifest in Scripture as to require no special justification. Presupposing these doctrines, then, we shall establish, again on purely Biblical grounds, the veracity of: c) the axiom, “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes.” Finally, we shall reflect briefly on the implications of this chapter’s findings and, in the epilogue, on the import of our dissertation as a whole.

⁶¹³ Augustine, *Doctr. Chr.* 1.5.5; CCL 32, 9.

II. The Deity of Jesus Christ

1. *Introduction.* Numerous texts of the New Testament at least seem to suggest that Jesus Christ is very God. In the Gospel of John alone, for instance, one reads: “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1); “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (5:23); “before Abraham was, I am” (8:58); “the Father and I are one” (10:30); “whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (12:45); “you call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am (13:13); “whoever has seen me has seen the Father (14:9); “all that the Father has is mine” (16:15); “my Lord and my God” (20:28), etc.. In the same Gospel, however, one finds numerous statements by and about Christ that seemingly call his deity into question. One reads, for example, “he was greatly disturbed in spirit” (11:33); “Jesus began to weep” (11:35); “my soul is troubled” (12:27); “he...began to wash the disciples’ feet” (13:5); “the Father is greater than I” (14:28); “they persecuted me” (15:20); “why do you strike me?” (18:24); “Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged” (19:1); “the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head” (19:2); “they crucified him” (19:18); “I am thirsty” (19:28); “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30); “I am ascending to...my God and your God” (20:17), etc..

Faced with such a seeming conflict, one could easily conclude that Scripture contradicts itself in its account of the nature(s) of Christ. Augustine, nonetheless, with the whole orthodox tradition, discerns in Scripture a criterion by which one can distinguish the referents of the seemingly conflicting texts about Christ and thus affirm them all in their literal sense without falling into self-contradiction. The “rule for resolving these questions throughout all of the holy Scriptures,” writes Augustine, “is brought forth to us from a chapter of an Epistle of the Apostle Paul, where that distinction is more manifestly commended: ‘who, when he was in the form of God, judged it no robbery to be equal to God, but emptied his very self [*semetipsum*] taking the form of a servant, being made in the similitude of men and found in habit as a man’” (Phil 2:6-7).⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁴ *De Trinitate* 1.7.14; CCL 50, 45-6.

2. *The significance of Philippians 2:6-7.* In this passage, Augustine finds, as it were, a “canonical rule”⁶¹⁵ for interpreting texts that ascribe seemingly incompatible properties to Christ. One must refer any property inapplicable to Christ’s deity to his humanity, i.e. “the form of a servant,” and any property inapplicable to Christ’s humanity to his deity, i.e. “the form of God.” By thus discriminating between those texts that describe the “form of God” from those texts that describe the “form of a servant,” Augustine harmonizes statements that otherwise might seem irreconcilably opposed. “According to the form of God,” the bishop of Hippo writes:

all things were made through him [John 1:3]. According to the form of a servant, he himself was made of a woman, made under the law [Gal 4:4]. According to the form of God, he himself and the Father are one [John 10:30]; according to the form of a servant, he did not come to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him [John 6:38]. According to the form of God, as the Father has life in his very self, so has he also given to the Son to have life in his very self [John 5:26]; according to the form of a servant, his soul is sorrowful all the way to death, and: Father, he says, if it can happen, let this cup pass [Matt 26:38-9]. According to the form of God, he himself is true God and life eternal [1 John 5:20]; according to the form of a servant, he became obedient all the way to death, even the death of the cross [Phil 2:8].⁶¹⁶

If one adopts Augustine’s interpretation of Phil 2:6-7, then, it seems that one can accept the Bible’s testimony to Christ’s deity in its full and natural force without in any way slighting Christ’s humanity. To vindicate Augustine’s construal of Phil 2:6-7, consequently, is practically to prove that Scripture affirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

3. *The centrality of μορφή.* In order to vindicate Augustine’s exegesis, moreover, it seems that one need merely establish that “form,” or μορφή, means something like “nature,” or οὐσία. For if: a) the Bible always speaks consistently and truthfully; b) God is simple (we shall defend this premise in a later section); and c) Christ is ἐν οὐσίᾳ θεοῦ, then d) controversial terms like ἀρπαγμός, κενόω, and ὑπερυψόω (Phil 2:9), at least in this context, can assume only a narrow range of meanings. Specifically, interpretations of ἀρπαγμός in the sense of a *res rapienda*, understandings of κενόω that entail “kenoticism,” and construals of ἴσα as indicative of anything less than absolute equality all seem *a priori* unacceptable if Christ’s ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων implies his ἐν οὐσίᾳ θεοῦ ὢν. In this case, moreover,

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 2.1.2; p. 81.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 1.11.22; p. 61.

ὑπερυψώω could bear only a superlative, as opposed to a comparative, sense, and the aorist participles λαβών, γενομένος, and εὔρεθείς could not conceivably refer to action prior to the state designated by ὑπάρχων. For the purpose of this investigation, in which we presuppose the doctrines of the verbal inspiration of Scripture, already proved, and divine simplicity, to be proved below, therefore, proof that μορφή in the context of Phil 2:6-7 constitutes a rough equivalent of οὐσία would suffice to eliminate the difficulties posed by other terms within these verses for Augustine's understanding of Phil 2:6-7 as a "canonical rule" for the interpretation of Scriptural language about Christ.

Two alternative construals of μορφή, however, seem sufficiently plausible to warrant consideration: the view that Paul uses μορφή interchangeably with εἰκών and the idea that μορφή in this context refers to a being's external appearance, its *Erscheinungsform*. Before defending our own views on this subject, therefore, we intend to evaluate these alternatives.

4. Μορφή = εἰκών.

a. Nuance or alternative? The first view, viz. that Paul employs μορφή in the sense of εἰκών in Phil 2:6-7 might seem more of a complement than a challenge to Augustine's exegesis. As André Feuillet observes:

Whereas in the Synoptics and the Apocalypse the εἰκών is always an artificial reproduction: the image of Caesar on a piece of money (Mark 12:6; Luke 20:24; Matt 22:20), the image of the beast (Rev 13:13; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2...), according to St. Paul, on the contrary, the image is something inseparable from the person: for him, to become conformed to "the image" of the Son of God is the same thing as to be configured "*à son corps*" *glorieux* (Rom 8:29; Phil 3:21). On the other hand, consequent upon this, the Apostle does not name the artificial reproduction of human beings or of animals "image" (εἰκών), but the copy of an image: ὁμοίωμα εἰκόνος (Rom 1:23).⁶¹⁷

One could plausibly argue, then, that even if Paul designates Christ "the image of God" in Phil 2:6, as he does twice elsewhere (2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15), he employs such

⁶¹⁷ "L'hymne Christologique de l'Épître aux Philippiens (II, 6-11)," *RB* 72 (1965) 352-80, 481-507 at 491. Cf. the similar remarks of Hermann Kleinknecht, "εἰκών C. The Greek Use of εἰκών," *TDNT* 2, 388-90 at 389; and Gerhard Kittel, "εἰκών F. The Metaphorical Use of Image in the NT," *ibid.*, 395-7 at 395.

language precisely to locate Christ within the very being of God. To the position that μορφή in Phil 2:6-7 is equivalent to εἰκών insofar as this term denotes “the thing itself” or “the genuine article,” therefore, we have few objections. Such a position seems virtually identical to our own μορφή = οὐσία interpretation, especially if one, following Augustine, considers the divine οὐσία an οὐσία πρώτη.

Many contemporary advocates of the view that μορφή = εἰκών in context of Phil 2:6-7, however, view the presumed correspondence of the terms as counterevidence to the claim that Paul ascribes ontological divinity to Christ in Phil 2:6. Some of those who equate μορφή and εἰκών, in fact, believe that Paul, in describing Christ as being ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ means to ascribe to him only the status possessed by the prelapsarian Adam: viz. that of being κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ (Gen 1:27 LXX).⁶¹⁸ To the extent that the μορφή = εἰκών hypothesis lends support to this “thoroughgoingly anthropological”⁶¹⁹ approach to Phil 2:6-7, therefore, we think it appropriate to treat it as an alternative to the Augustinian interpretation of μορφή in Phil 2:6-7.

b. Arguments in favor. Supporters of the μορφή = εἰκών hypothesis have proposed three, principal arguments in its defense. First, these scholars observe, the LXX employs μορφή in Dan 3:19 to translate ܡܪܦܗ, the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew ܡܝܬܝܬܐ. Since the LXX translates ܡܝܬܝܬܐ in Gen 1:26-7 and elsewhere with εἰκών, this argument implies, μορφή must convey much the same meaning as εἰκών.⁶²⁰ Second, proponents of this view note, the Peshitta employs ܡܪܦܗ, a Syriac word closely related to ܡܝܬܝܬܐ, to translate μορφή in Phil 2:6-7. Since ܡܝܬܝܬܐ appears in parallelism to ܡܝܬܝܬܐ (=εἰκών) in Gen 1:26, the Peshitta translation

⁶¹⁸ Hans-Werner Bartsch, for example, writes, “The second Adam is man as God wishes him to be—and this the first Adam was not—but he is, therefore, nonetheless as a creature of God equal to the first Adam” (*Die konkrete Wahrheit und die Lüge der Spekulation* [TW 1; Frankfurt-am-Main and Bern: Peter Lang, 1974], 68, Anm. 63; cf. also 21, 25-7, 32-40, and 129-30). For similarly minimalist perspectives on the meaning of μορφή in Phil 2:6, cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980), 114-21; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 282-8; John MacQuarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London and Philadelphia: SCM and Trinity Press, 1990), 56-9; George Howard, “Phil 2:6-11 and the Human Christ,” *CBQ* 40 (1978), 368-87, esp. 377; and John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (London: SCM, 1973), 163-4.

⁶¹⁹ We borrow this phrase from Lincoln D. Hurst, who employs it to characterize the position of Dunn (“Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited” in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, ed., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* [Louisville: WJK, 1998], 84-95 at 85).

⁶²⁰ Cf., e.g. Jean Héring, *Le royaume de Dieu et sa venue: Etude sur l'espérance de Jésus et de l'apôtre Paul* (Bibliothèque Théologique; Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1959), 161, n. 2.

suggests that μορφή bears a meaning equivalent to that of εἰκών in Phil 2:6-7.⁶²¹ Third and finally, those who equate μορφή and εἰκών observe that two cognates of μορφή, viz. σύμμορφος and μεταμορφόομαι, appear in sufficiently close proximity to εἰκών in Rom 8:29 and 2 Cor 3:18 to suggest that Paul considers the terms synonymous.⁶²²

i. The argument from the LXX translation of ܡܪܦܗ by μορφή. These arguments have persuaded such distinguished students of the New Testament as Ernst Lohmeyer,⁶²³ Oscar Cullmann,⁶²⁴ and Joseph Fitzmeyer⁶²⁵ to embrace the view that μορφή = εἰκών in the context of Phil 2:6-7. The arguments in question, however, have by no means met with universal approval. Dave Steenburg, for example, subjects the argument from the LXX translation of ܡܪܦܗ by μορφή to the equivalency of μορφή and εἰκών to a searching critique in his “The Case against the Synonymity of *Morphē* and *Eikōn*.”⁶²⁶ In the LXX, Steenburg observes:

only once does *morphē* translate *šlm* and it is not in the sense of either ‘image’ or ‘likeness’. *šlm* in all but one of its occurrences either signifies ‘idol’ or is used to speak of man as being ‘in the image of God’. In almost all of these cases it is translated by *eikōn* (26x), exceptions being the resort to *homoiōma* (twice) and *typos* (once), both words being used in the sense of ‘idol’. The unique occurrence of *morphē* as a translation of *šlm* is found in Dan 3:19, where its Aramaic counterpart is used in the sense of ‘appearance’. Theodotion also avoids *eikōn* here by using *opsis* (‘face’ or ‘countenance’), a word which, like *morphē*, is nowhere else in the LXX used to translate *šlm*. This suggests rather strongly that *morphē* is used, not because it is synonymous with *eikōn*, but because it covers a rare portion of *šlm*’s semantic field that *eikōn* does not. Therefore, there is no basis for speaking of the interchangeability of the two words in the LXX on the basis of their relationship to *šlm*.⁶²⁷

To this argument, we have nothing to add. The LXX translation of ܡܪܦܗ by μορφή in Dan 3:19, at least when viewed in the light of Steenburg’s discussion, seems not to imply that μορφή denotes εἰκών in the context of Phil 2:6-7.

⁶²¹ Cf., e.g. Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d’après les épîtres Pauliniennes* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 345.

⁶²² Cf., e.g., Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (SNTSM 4; Cambridge: CUP, 1967), 115-16.

⁶²³ *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5-11* (SHAW.PH; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1961⁴), 17-18, Anm. 1; 20, Anm. 1.

⁶²⁴ *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 176-7.

⁶²⁵ “The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11,” *CBQ* 50 (1988), 470-83 at 476.

⁶²⁶ *JSNT* 34 (1988), 77-86.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

ii. *The argument from the Peshitta's translation of ܬܡܢܐ by ܐܝܠܗܐ.* The second argument for the $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ = $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ hypothesis, viz. that from the Peshitta's use of ܐܝܠܗܐ to translate $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ in Phil 2:6-7, possesses two great advantages. First, it seems difficult to dispute that, at least in the context of Gen 1:26, the terms ܥܠܐ (= $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$) and ܬܡܢܐ (= ܐܝܠܗܐ) are employed synonymously.⁶²⁸ Second, and even more importantly, the translators of the Peshitta lend credit to the $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ = $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ hypothesis not only by translating $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ with ܐܝܠܗܐ in Phil 2:6-7 and Mark 16:12, but also by also by translating $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ with ܐܝܠܗܐ in Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7 and 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; and Col 1:15 and 3:10.⁶²⁹

Two factors, however, tend to countervail this argument's strengths. First, the argument's Septuagintal basis seems somewhat strained. Admittedly, the LXX does translate ܥܠܐ with $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ in Gen 1:26 and thus places $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ in parallelism to ܬܡܢܐ, which in this context constitutes a synonym of ܥܠܐ and which in this case is rendered by $\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\iota\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha$. The LXX, moreover, does translate ܬܡܢܐ with $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ in Gen 5:1. In no other instance, however, does it translate ܬܡܢܐ with $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$, and in no case whatsoever does it translate ܬܡܢܐ with $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$.⁶³⁰

Second, the semantic ranges of $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ and ܐܝܠܗܐ do not overlap completely. The Peshitta's translators, for instance, employ ܐܝܠܗܐ as a substitute for $\tau\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron\varsigma$ in Rom 6:17: "But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching [$\tau\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron\nu$ διδασκαλίας] to which you were entrusted."⁶³¹ Likewise, one finds ܐܝܠܗܐ employed to render $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\delta\omicron\varsigma$, in the sense of "genus," in the Syriac translation of Eusebius' *Acta martyrorum Palestini* 35.12 and 39.5.⁶³² While the Peshitta translators' employment of ܐܝܠܗܐ as a translation of $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ and $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ buttresses the hypothesis that $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ = $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ in Phil 2:6-7, therefore, it does not positively exclude alternative interpretations.

⁶²⁸ Cf. H. D. Preus, "ܬܡܢܐ; ܥܠܐ," *TDOT* 3, 250-60 at 259 and F. J. Stendebach, "ܥܠܐ," *TDOT* 12, 386-96 at 394.

⁶²⁹ We owe these references to R. Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacum* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 914. Strangely, the advocates of the $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$ = $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ hypothesis whose works we have reviewed make no mention of the Peshitta translators' employment of ܐܝܠܗܐ as a substitute for $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omega\nu$ in the New Testament.

⁶³⁰ Cf. David H. Wallace, "A Note on $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\acute{\eta}$," *TZ* 22 (1966), 19-25 at 21.

⁶³¹ Again, we are indebted to Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacum* 1, 914 for this reference.

⁶³² We owe these references to Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1928²), 157a.

iii. The argument from Paul's juxtaposition of cognates of μορφή with εἰκών.

The third argument for this theory, viz. that from Paul's juxtaposition of εἰκών and cognates of μορφή in Rom 8:29 and 2 Cor 3:18, seems similarly inconclusive. In the first passage, Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ), in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family." In the second passage, likewise, Paul writes, "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα) from one degree of glory to another." On the basis of these passages a supporter of the μορφή = εἰκών hypothesis could argue:

1. A person can be σύμμορφος to or μεταμορφοῦται into only that which is itself a μορφή;
2. Paul states that he and other Christians are, to a certain extent at least, συμμόρφοι to and that they μεταμορφούμεθα into a particular εἰκών; therefore
3. That particular εἰκών is a μορφή.

This argument seems sound, but not quite to the point. The word εἰκών in this context manifestly refers to something substantial, a μορφή to which one can be σύμμορφος, and in this sense, the εἰκών is, indeed, a μορφή. By describing Christ's μορφή as an εἰκών, however, Paul portrays it in the aspect of an exemplar to which the μορφαί of Christians become similar, albeit not identical. Paul conveys a meaning with the term εἰκών, that is to say, that he does not and probably could not convey with the word μορφή. It seems, then, that although one can accurately describe the referent of εἰκών in Rom 8:29 and 2 Cor 3:18 as a μορφή, it is not at all obvious that one could substitute μορφή for εἰκών without altering Paul's meaning. This argument establishes, consequently, only that the terms μορφή and εἰκών can share a common referent: not that they can convey the same meaning.

c. Difficulties. The three, principal arguments employed in defense of the hypothesis that μορφή = εἰκών in the context of Phil 2:6-7 thus seem not to demonstrate its probability. Three additional considerations should suffice to prove the μορφή = εἰκών hypothesis unlikely. First, as Peter T. O'Brien observes, "Adam is nowhere in the LXX or the NT referred to as μορφή θεοῦ"⁶³³ as one would expect him to be if μορφή θεοῦ conveyed the same meaning as εἰκών θεοῦ. Second, as Teresia Yai-Chow Wong notes, "in the LXX, μορφή is never used in the context of man's creation, nor of his relation to God"⁶³⁴ as one would expect it to be, again, if it were closely associated with the Biblical idea of the image of God. Third and finally, in the words of Joachim Gnilka, "ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων cannot...be so understood, that the pre-existent existed according to the image of God. [For] μορφή is employed again in the same sense in v. 7 and, therefore, can have no other sense than it has in v. 6."⁶³⁵ To clarify what Gnilka rightly describes as the *Haupteinwand* ⁶³⁶ to the μορφή = εἰκών position: unless Paul equivocates enormously, μορφή must bear at least roughly the same meaning in v. 7 as it bears in v. 6. Yet Christ certainly takes to himself more than the image of a servant; he becomes a servant, however one wishes to express that more precisely. It seems, consequently, that when Paul describes Christ as ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ in Phil 2:6, he must ascribe to Christ some more intimate relationship to God than that of being created ἐν εἰκόνι θεοῦ (Gen 9:6 LXX). The Son's real identification with a δοῦλος thus excludes the μορφή = εἰκών hypothesis in its "thoroughgoingly anthropological" sense.

5. Μορφή = *Erscheinungsform*. The second alternative to our understanding of μορφή in Phil 2:6-7, viz. the position that μορφή in this context signifies "visible appearance," or *Erscheinungsform*, finds eloquent expression in Johannes Behm's article, "μορφή" in the *TDNT*.

⁶³³ *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 263-4.

⁶³⁴ "The Problem of Pre-Existence in Philippians 2, 6-11," *ETL* 62 (1986), 267-82 at 272.

⁶³⁵ *Der Philipperbrief* (HThKNT 10:3; Freiburg: Herder, 1987⁴), 139. Cf. the similar remarks of Hans-Heinrich Schade, *Apokalyptische Christologie bei Paulus: Studien zum Zusammenhang von Christologie und Eschatologie in den Paulusbriefen* (GTA 18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 66.

⁶³⁶ *Der Philipperbrief*, 139.

The phrase μορφή θεοῦ, which Paul coins in obvious antithesis to μορφή δούλου, can be understood only in the light of the context. The appearance assumed by the incarnate Lord, the image of humiliation and obedient submission, stands in the sharpest conceivable contrast to His former appearance, the image of sovereign divine majesty, whose restoration in a new and even more glorious form is depicted for the exalted κύριος at the conclusion of the hymn, v. 10 f. The specific outward sign of the humanity of Jesus is the μορφή δούλου, and of his essential divine likeness (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ...) the μορφή θεοῦ. The lofty terminology of the hymn can venture to speak of the form or visible appearance of God in this antithesis on the theological basis of the δόξα concept of the Greek Bible, which is also that of Paul, and according to which the majesty of God is visibly expressed in the radiance of heavenly light.⁶³⁷

As before, one could argue for the functional identity of this interpretation of μορφή in Phil 2:6-7 with that of Augustine. For, if the μορφή θεοῦ is equivalent to the δόξα κυρίου, and the Lord will give his glory to no other (Isa 42:8; 48:11), then it might appear that Christ's ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων would entail his essential deity.⁶³⁸ It seems, however, that an interpreter of Phil 2:6-7 who identified μορφή in this context as *Erscheinungsform* could reconcile Paul's ascription to Christ of existence ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ with a denial of Christ's ontological divinity in at least two ways. First, such a person could reasonably claim that Paul means to identify Christ with the μορφή θεοῦ in Behm's sense of the term and thus relegate Christ to the status of a manifestation of divine glory.⁶³⁹ Second, an exegete who accepted the μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* hypothesis could consistently argue that a being of lesser dignity than the Father, could exist ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ if by this phrase one means, "in the realm of the effulgence of God's glory."⁶⁴⁰ It seems advisable, therefore, to treat the μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* hypothesis as an alternative to, rather than a variant of, the Augustinian interpretation.

a. Arguments in favor. Supporters of this alternative hypothesis appeal to two, principal arguments in defense of their position.⁶⁴¹ First, these scholars note, the root

⁶³⁷ Johannes Behm, "μορφή," *TDNT* 4, 742-52 at 751.

⁶³⁸ Calvin employs this argument in his *In Epistolam ad Philippenses Commentarius* at 2:6 (*Opera Exegetica* 16: *Commentarii in Pauli Epistolas ad Galatos et al.* [Helmut Feld, ed.; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992], 320-1).

⁶³⁹ Cf. the exegesis of Phil 2:6-9 on p. 283 of Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa's "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983), 269-88.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. C. A. Wanamaker, "Philippians 2.6-11: Son of God or Adamic Christology," *NTS* 33 (1987), 179-93 at 187-8.

⁶⁴¹ We realize that these two arguments do not exhaust the arsenal of those who advocate the μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* hypothesis. Having already shown that ܡܪܝܬܐ can signify an invisible essence, however, we think it unnecessary to address here the argument for the μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* hypothesis from the Peshitta's translation of both μορφή and ὁμοίωμα in Phil 2:6-7 with ܡܪܝܬܐ.

μορφή- appears to bear this sense in a number of NT texts. Specifically, μορφή itself (Mark 16:12) and μόρφωσις (2 Tim 3:5) appear in the NT in the sense of “external appearance,” while μεταμορφόω in Matt 17:2 and Mark 9:2 refers to the transfiguration precisely of Christ’s appearance.⁶⁴² Second, proponents of this view observe, the word μορφή seems to bear the meaning, “external appearance,” in each of the seven instances in which the LXX employs it (Judg 8:18; Isa 44:13; Job 4:16; Dan 3:19; Wis 18:1; Tob 1:13; 4 Macc 15:4).⁶⁴³ The Greek Bible as a whole, such persons argue, thus appears to supply ample testimony to the view that μορφή, at least in its Biblical usage, signifies something like an *Erscheinungsform*.

i. The argument from NT use of μορφή and its derivatives in the sense of “visible appearance.” As to the first argument, that from the four instances in which the NT employs μορφή or its cognates to convey the idea of an *Erscheinungsform*: J. B. Lightfoot, in his classic commentary on Philippians, maintains that in at least six cases within the Pauline corpus, the cognates of μορφή bear an unmistakably substantial sense. One can glean the meaning and force of Lightfoot’s argument from the following extract in which he contrasts the meanings of μορφή and σχῆμα in the NT. “A review of the passages where σχῆμα and its derivatives are used,” writes Lightfoot:

will not, I think, leave any doubt on the mind that this word retains the notion of ‘instability, changeableness,’ quite as strongly as in classical Greek. Thus ‘the fashion of this world,’ which ‘passeth away,’ is τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (1 Cor. vii. 31)...The fictitious illusory transformation whereby evil assumes the mask of good—the false apostles appearing as the true, the

A brief discussion of this subject appears in Paul Joüon’s “Notes philologiques sur quelques versets de l’épître aux *Philippiens*,” *RSR* 28 (1938), 89-93, 223-33, 299-311 at 223-4.

We shall refrain from discussing the Hellenistic texts adduced by Stephen E. Fowl (*The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* [JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 50-53) to authenticate the synonymy of μορφή and *Erscheinungsform*, moreover, because they appear to us only tangentially relevant to Phil 2:6-7. As Markus Bockmuehl explains, “most of the pre-Christian Greek texts [in which μορφή signifies a visible divine form] relate explicitly or at least implicitly to the classic legends of Greek mythology, a context without which even transferred applications...would remain meaningless. Especially given the clearly Jewish Christian tenor of our passage [then] a direct dependence on this material must be deemed highly unlikely” (“‘The Form of God’ (Phil. 2:6) Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism,” *JThS* 48 NS [1997], 1-23 at 7).

Our reasons for passing in silence the Jewish and early Christian texts adduced by Bockmuehl himself in pp. 11-19 of the just-mentioned article, finally, will become apparent in 5.b below.

⁶⁴² Behm, “μορφή,” 750, 755, 758. In these loci, it seems, Behm implicitly appeals to the meaning of cognates of μορφή in order to bolster his interpretation of μορφή itself.

⁶⁴³ Behm, “μορφή,” 746.

prince of darkness as an angel of light, the ministers of Satan as ministers of righteousness—is described by the thrice repeated word μετασχηματίζεσθαι (2 Cor. xi. 13, 14, 15)...On the other hand the great and entire change of the inner life, otherwise described as being born again, being created anew, is spoken of as a conversion of μορφή always, of σχῆμα never. Thus ‘he fore-ordained them conformable (συμμόρφους) to the image of his Son’ (Rom. viii. 29); ‘Being made conformable (συμμορφιζόμενος) to his death’ (Phil. iii. 10); ‘We are transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) into the same image (2 Cor. iii. 18); ‘To be transformed by the renewal of your mind’ (Rom. xii. 2); ‘Until Christ be formed (μορφωθῇ) in you’ (Gal. iv. 19).⁶⁴⁴

As Wong explains, μεταμορφόομαι, as opposed to μετασχηματίζω, “must be understood as implying the essential transformation of Christians into a new life....What matters is not simply an external change which leaves the interior self untouched. The latter is precisely the malfeasance of the false apostles that Paul attacks in 2 Cor 11, 13-15. Christian life should not be like that. Thus, Paul pleads for an authentic transformation of the self in which a completely new life comes about.”⁶⁴⁵ That Paul would choose μεταμορφόομαι to convey this meaning would seem quite odd, of course, if μορφή, the word from which μεταμορφόομαι derives, signified nothing more than “external appearance” in mid-first century Greek. It seems more reasonable to suppose, rather, that the term μορφή can denote both an *Erscheinungsform* and at least something like a substance in Paul’s Greek and to determine which of the two meanings the word conveys in any given verse on the basis of its context.

ii. *The argument from the LXX usage of μορφή.* The instances in which the LXX employs μορφή in the sense of “external appearance,” moreover, seem insufficient to overturn this conclusion. For, although the term μορφή does manifestly convey this sense in each of the texts in question: a) the six instances in which the LXX employs the term hardly exhaust the range of its possible meanings in Hellenistic Greek; and b) the LXX never applies μορφή or its cognates to God.⁶⁴⁶

b. *Difficulties.* The two principal arguments usually employed in defense of the view that μορφή = *Erscheinungsform*, therefore, seem insufficient to establish this

⁶⁴⁴ St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians (London and New York: MacMillan, 1890), 130.

⁶⁴⁵ Wong, “The Problem of Pre-Existence,” 271.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. Pierre Grelot, “Deux expressions difficiles de Philippiens 2, 6-7,” *Bib* 53 (1972), 495-507 at 503.

conclusion. Two additional considerations should suffice to exclude it. First, Gnika's *Haupteinwand* to the view that μορφή = εἰκών in Phil 2:6⁶⁴⁷ applies equally to the hypothesis that μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* in the same context. Unless Paul equivocates tremendously in his use of μορφή in this pericope, the term must bear the same meaning in Phil 2:7 as it does in 2:6. If the by μορφή in v. 7, however, Paul meant nothing more than *Erscheinungsform*, he would declare in this verse merely that Christ took the appearance of a servant: in which case, it seems, he would hardly have been able to become ὑπῆκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.

Second, the Apostle Paul, who includes θειοτήτες itself among the "invisible things of God" (Rom 1:20) would surely never ascribe a visible form to "the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 1 Tim 1:17). As Walter Kasper explains, "the term *morphē* may mean either the outward phenomenal form or visible figure, or else the being itself.... Since it is not possible to speak of God having an outward form [then]..., it is hard to avoid concluding that the present passage is speaking of 'essential form.'"⁶⁴⁸ One cannot construe μορφή in this context as *Erscheinungsform*, therefore, without implicitly accusing Paul of contravening the doctrine of divine invisibility.

6. Μορφή = οὐσία . A process of elimination, then, leads to the conclusion that μορφή, as Paul employs it in Phil 2:6, signifies something like οὐσία. This construal of Paul's words possesses the advantages: a) of confirming the Augustinian interpretation of Phil 2:6-8 and thus rendering intelligible the co-existence of statements that imply more or less directly Christ's deity with subordinationist language in the writings of Paul and other Biblical authors; and b) of possessing an enormous fund of patristic support. The latter circumstance, of course, might give rise to the suspicion that the μορφή = οὐσία interpretation constitutes a relic of pre-

⁶⁴⁷ *Der Philipperbrief*, 139.

⁶⁴⁸ *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1984), 176. We owe this citation to Nunzio Capizzi, "Soteriologia in Fil 2:6-11?" *Greg* 81 (2000), 221-48 at 229. Others who reject the μορφή = *Erscheinungsform* hypothesis because of its incompatibility with the doctrine of divine invisibility include David J. MacLeod, "Imitating the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-8," *BSac* 158 (2001), 308-30 at 313, n. 24; Hermann Binder, "Erwägungen zu Phil 2 6-7b," *ZNW* 78 (1987), 230-43 at 235; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 84; Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, "'Der in Gottesgestalt war...' Erneute Kritik der Einheitsübersetzung," *TQ* 161 (1981), 288-304 at 295; Ceslas Spicq, "Note sur μορφή dans les papyrus et quelques inscriptions," *RB* 80 (1973), 37-45 at 45; Lucien Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York, Edinburgh, and London: Herder and Thomas Nelson, 1959), 385; and Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 132.

critical exegesis driven more by dogmatic than historical concerns. Lightfoot argues, nonetheless, that in thus interpreting Phil 2:6-7, the Fathers seem to be animated by something more than mere dogmatic prejudice. "It is not surprising that they should have taken this view," he writes, "but they could hardly have insisted with such confidence on the identity of μορφή and οὐσία, unless they had at least a reasonable case on their side."⁶⁴⁹ The principal objections to the μορφή = οὐσία hypothesis, viz. that such a usage of μορφή by Paul would have required a more Hellenistic background, a more philosophical orientation, and a more advanced Christology than he, in fact, possessed, seem, in any event, ill conceived.

For, first, if one credits Luke's account of Paul's speech on the Areopagus in Acts 17:22-31 and accepts the authenticity of 1 Corinthians and Titus, then one must admit that Paul possessed at least enough Greek culture to pepper his discourses with quotations of Aratus,⁶⁵⁰ Menander,⁶⁵¹ and Epimenides.⁶⁵² It seems hardly reasonable, therefore, to reject the μορφή = οὐσία interpretation simply because it has a Hellenistic ring to it. To the second charge, viz. that Paul lacked the philosophical wherewithal to employ μορφή in the sense of οὐσία, one can hardly respond better than Lightfoot. "In accepting this conclusion [viz. that μορφή in Phil 2:6-7 = οὐσία]," he writes:

we need not assume that St. Paul consciously derived his use of the term from any philosophical nomenclature. There was sufficient definiteness even in its popular usage to suggest this meaning when it was transferred from the objects of sense to the conceptions of the mind. Yet if St. John adopted λόγος, if St. Paul himself adopted εἰκὼν, πρωτότοκος, and the like, from the language of existing theological schools, it seems very far from improbable that the closely analogous expression μορφή θεοῦ should have been derived from a similar source. The speculations of Alexandrian and Gnostic Judaism formed a ready channel, by which the philosophical terms of ancient Greece were brought within reach of the Apostles of Christ.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 133, n. 1.

⁶⁵⁰ Paul's speech in the Areopagus, as recorded by Luke, includes a quotation from Aratus' *Phenomena* 5 at Acts 17:28 (*Aratos: Phénomènes: Tome I* [Jean Martin, ed. and trans.; CUFr; Paris: Les belles lettres, 1998], 1).

⁶⁵¹ In 1 Cor 15:33, Paul quotes a verse from Menander's now almost completely lost play *Thais* (*Menander quae supersunt: Pars altera* (Alfred Koerte, ed.; Andreas Thierfelder, rev.; BSGRT; Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1959²), fragment 187(218), p. 74.

⁶⁵² Jerome identifies the Cretans' "very own prophet" whom Paul quotes in Titus 1:12 as Epimenides, who, according to Jerome, composed a book either of or about oracles (*Commentarius in Titum* at 1:12; CCL 77C, 29).

⁶⁵³ Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 133.

As to the third objection, viz. that Paul's Christology had not advanced to such an extent that he could seriously describe Christ as ἐν οὐσίᾳ θεῶ: a cursory survey of Paul's Epistles shows that he continually speaks of Christ in ways at least suggestive of his essential deity. In Col 1:19, for instance, Paul writes, "In him [i.e. Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Again, in Col 2:9, Paul writes, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Paul describes Christ as κύριος, i.e. the Septuagintal equivalent of יהוה, 97 times in his Epistles. He testifies to his belief in Christ's deity most strikingly, perhaps, in 1 Cor 8:6 where, in Gerald O'Collins' words, "Paul splits the *Shema*." As O'Collins explains, in this text:

Paul splits the *Shema* or Jewish confession par excellence of monotheism (Deut 6:4-5), glossing "God" with "Father" and "Lord" with "Jesus Christ" to put Jesus as Lord alongside God as Father: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). Here the title "one Lord" expands the *Shema* to include Jesus Christ. Using the classic monotheistic text of Judaism, [then,] Paul recasts his inherited perception of God by introducing Jesus as "Lord" and redefining Jewish monotheism to produce a Christological monotheism.⁶⁵⁴

It scarcely seems reasonable, therefore, to dispute the μορφή = οὐσία hypothesis simply on the grounds that Paul's Christology was insufficiently "advanced."

7. *Conclusion.* It seems, then, that Paul does mean something like οὐσία by the word μορφή as he employs it in Phil 2:6-7. In this case: a) Phil 2:6-7 constitutes a clear Biblical testimony to the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ; and b) given the presuppositions that God is simple and that the possibilities of change and inequality within the deity are, therefore, excluded, Phil 2:6-7 does, indeed, constitute a rationale for referring subordinationistic language to Christ's human nature while allowing Biblical testimonies to Christ's deity to retain their full force.

⁶⁵⁴ "The Incarnation under Fire," 268.

III. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

As we noted earlier, it seems unnecessary to prove that the expressions “Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of God” do, on at least some occasions, refer to God himself. The point is patently obvious in such texts as:

1. “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God [1 Cor 2:11]; and
2. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...[1 Cor 6:19]?”

Unless Paul means to say that God is ignorant of “what is truly God’s” or that the Christian’s body is an idolatrous temple to a creature known as “the Holy Spirit,” he manifestly employs the terms “Spirit of God” and “Holy Spirit” in these texts to refer to God.

Although the Spirit’s distinct personality is more controverted than his deity, proving this point as well may, perhaps, prove similarly unproblematic. It would be exceedingly odd, for instance, for Christ to describe the Holy Spirit as “another Advocate” (John 14:16) than himself whom he will send from the Father (John 15:26) if Christ and the Holy Spirit were, in fact, simply the same. The Holy Spirit, moreover, could not conceivably testify on Christ’s behalf (John 15:26) without some distinction between the persons. Likewise, the Holy Spirit’s inclusion in the baptismal formula (Matt 28:19) seems inexplicable if the Holy Spirit does not, like the Father and the Son, constitute a distinctly subsisting divine person. It requires little ingenuity, therefore, to establish the Holy Spirit’s distinctness from the Father and the Son. This, of course, constitutes the final step in our argument that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute three distinct divine persons; or, in Augustine’s words, “The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each individual of these is God, and at the same time all are one God....The Father is neither the Son

nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; [and] the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.”⁶⁵⁵

It seems, therefore, that one can legitimately derive the deity and personal distinctness of the Trinitarian persons from the data of Scripture without presupposing the accuracy of Rahner’s *Grundaxiom*. These truths in isolation, however, do not constitute the fully developed, orthodox, Latin doctrine of the Trinity. We shall not have shown this to be deducible exclusively from Scripture premises alone before we have established, without appealing to extra-Scriptural premises, what Bourassa describes as “the fundamental principle consecrated by the [great, Trinitarian] dogmatic definitions: [viz. that] the three persons, really distinct among themselves, are one and the same God, and are distinguished in the possession of the same divine substance or nature only by the opposition of their relations of origin, in such a way that all that in God is an absolute perfection, as power, bounty, wisdom, knowledge, and love, is common to the three persons, as essential attribution, and possessed by each in virtue of his essence.”⁶⁵⁶ In other words, we shall not have vindicated the possibility of deriving a strictly orthodox, Western Trinitarianism from Scriptural premises alone until we have derived, exclusively from the data of Scripture, the axiom: “In God all things are one where no opposition of relation intervenes.”⁶⁵⁷ In the following, accordingly, we intend to show that the Biblical doctrines of divine simplicity, the transitivity of identity, the eternal generation of the Son, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, when properly understood, entail precisely this axiom. Before establishing the connection between these doctrines and the axiom in question, however, it seems appropriate to demonstrate that these doctrines themselves possess an adequate, Biblical foundation.

⁶⁵⁵ Augustine, *Doctr. Chr.* 1.5.5; CCL 32, 9.

⁶⁵⁶ “Communion du Père et du Fils,” *Questions de théologie Trinitaire*, 125-89 at 146-7

⁶⁵⁷ DH 1330.

IV. In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes

1. *Premises of Our Argument.*

a. Divine simplicity. One can deduce the doctrine of divine simplicity most readily, it seems, from two more immediately Biblical doctrines: first, that God “created all things” (Rev 4:11; cf. Eph 3:9; John 1:3 and Col 1:16); and, second, that he who creates some perfection must possess that perfection antecedently in himself. This principle seems to constitute the suppressed major premise of the following enthymeme (Ps 94:9; cf. Ex 4:11): “He who planted the ear, does he not hear? he who formed the eye, does he not see?”

The second doctrine supplies an adequate basis for the following argument in *modus tollens*:

1. If any perfection of God is a creature of God, then a creature of God is possessed by God antecedently to its creation;
2. But no creature of God is possessed by God antecedently to its creation; therefore
3. No perfection of God is a creature.

Employing the first doctrine as major premise and the conclusion to the preceding argument as minor premise, one can then construct the following syllogism in *Camestres*.

1. Everything other than God is a creature of God;
2. No perfection of God is a creature of God; therefore
3. No perfection of God is other than God.

Now, one can validly permute the conclusion of this syllogism into the proposition: Every perfection of God is not other than God. Since the principle of the excluded middle dictates that that which is not other must be the same, one can justly conclude, then, that God is the same as each of his attributes: that, in other words, he is simple.⁶⁵⁸

The Bible corroborates this claim, moreover, not only by supplying premises from which it may be deduced, but also by testifying that God possesses the characteristics one would expect of a metaphysically simple being. Such a being, for instance, is, as we have seen, *per definitionem* identical with his attributes; and the Bible, accordingly, identifies God with the divine attributes of existence (Ex 3:14), truth (John 14:6), life (John 11:25; 14:26), light (1 John 1:5), and love (1 John 4:8, 16). A simple being, likewise, possesses *per definitionem* the perfection of immutability; and the Bible, accordingly, ascribes immutability to God in his being (Ps 102: 26-7; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:10-12, 13:8; James 1:17) and in his will (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 33:11; Rom 11:29; Heb 6:17-18). It seems overwhelmingly likely, therefore, that the Bible does, at least indirectly, teach the doctrine of divine simplicity.

b. The transitivity of identity. The evidence that the Bible also sanctions the principle of the transitivity of identity, i.e. the principle that if $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$, seems similarly compelling. Christ himself seems to employ this principle, for instance, in Matt 25:34-40. At the final judgment, he announces, the son of man “will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,’ etc.. ‘Then,’ Christ continues, ‘the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?’ etc.. ‘And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Christ answers the question of the righteous, in other words, with the equivalent of the following syllogism in *Dimaris*:

⁶⁵⁸ For the idea of deriving the doctrine of divine simplicity from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, we are indebted to Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object?” *Noûs* 24 (1990), 581-98.

1. You are all those who have cared for members of my family;
2. All those who have cared for members of my family are those who have cared for me; therefore
3. You are those who have cared for me.

Now, if one signifies “you” with “a,” “all those who have cared for members of my family” with “b,” and “those who have cared for me” with “c,” one can restate this argument as: if $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$. The principle of the transitivity of identity thus appears to possess Scriptural, and even dominical, warrant.

c. The eternal generation of the Son. That the Bible also witnesses to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father seems equally evident from the text of Scripture itself. The Bible testifies to this doctrine most notably by designating Christ the Father’s “only begotten Son,” (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).⁶⁵⁹ By representing the Son as the Father’s Word (Ps 33:6; John 1:1, 14) and Wisdom (Ps 136:5; Pr 3:19; Jer 10:12; 51:15; 1 Cor 1:24), moreover, Scripture identifies this begetting as an immanent generation *per modum intellectionis* and thus clarifies how the absolutely immaterial Father can “beget” a consubstantial Son. Lest anyone attempt to construe this intelligible generation as a merely temporal occurrence, finally, Scripture testifies that Christ’s “comings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2).⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ The NRSV translators render μονογενής in each of these verses merely as “only.” This, of course, is not an unreasonable translation. The frequent employment of μονογενής by the Septuagint’s translators as an equivalent of יְחִידָא, in fact, weighs quite heavily in favor of the NRSV translation, and even the AV renders μονογενής as “only” in Luke 7:12, 8:42, and 9:48.

In each of the five instances (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) in which John employs the word, however, he places it in close proximity to passages concerning spiritual begetting and birth. Now, the connection between the word μονογενής and words like γεννάω, γέννημα, and γέννησις, all of which can refer to birth and begetting, is too obvious to escape the attention of John or that of his readers. John’s intense concern for establishing parallels between Christ and Christians, moreover, renders implausible the hypothesis that John juxtaposed μονογενής with “begetting” language five times purely by accident. It seems, therefore, that, the Septuagint translators’ use of μονογενής notwithstanding, one cannot reasonably deny that John intends for his readers to understand this term as at least connotative of begetting: i.e. as “only begotten” and not merely “only.”

We owe the argument of this footnote to Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (Johnannes G. Vos, rev.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953²), 212-18. Cf. also John V. Dahms’ excellent article, “The Johannine Use of Monogenēs Reconsidered,” *NTS* 29 (1983), 222-32.

⁶⁶⁰ The NRSV translators render Micah 5:2b: “whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” It would seem more apt, however, to render מְצִאֵת as “comings forth” and thus to alert the reader to

d. *The eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.* That the Father also eternally “spirates” the Holy Spirit, that is, that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the person of the Father, appears, likewise, from John 15:26. In this text, Christ tells his disciples that “when the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who comes [i.e. ἐκπορεύεται] from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.” Some exegetes,⁶⁶¹ admittedly, have seen in the phrase, “who comes from the Father” (ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται) a reference, not to the Spirit’s eternal procession from the Father, but to his temporal mission in salvation history. The tense of the verb “comes” (ἐκπορεύεται), however, positively excludes this interpretation. For, at this point in salvation history, “there was no Spirit [sc. he had not yet been given]; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). The verb, “comes” (ἐκπορεύεται), then, can refer only to an immanent divine act which, by virtue of God’s eternity and immutability, must continue unchanged forever.⁶⁶² John 15:26, therefore, at least seems to teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the person of the Father.

the etymological connection between מִן־עוֹלָם and עוֹלָם. The NRSV rendering of עוֹלָם as “ancient,” moreover, seems incongruous when one considers the purpose for which Micah employs the term: viz. to contrast the obscurity of Bethlehem, the future king’s home town, with the antiquity (which connotes eminence) of his ancestry. For Micah could hardly have regarded David, who died less than 150 years before the outset of Micah’s prophetic career, as an “ancient” ancestor of Christ, and Christ’s descent from genuinely ancient dignitaries such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham would not have distinguished him from the ordinary Jew.

The translation of עוֹלָם as “ancient,” therefore, seems to deprive Micah’s comparison of rhetorical impact. If Micah employed this term in the sense of “eternity,” however, it seems that he would convey a stark contrast. Since עוֹלָם appears elsewhere in the Old Testament with the meaning “eternity” (cf. Ps 90:2 and Isa 63:16); and since, by employing עוֹלָם with the meaning, “eternity,” Micah would achieve the rhetorical end he obviously seeks; it seems not improbable that Micah himself employs עוֹלָם in this sense. In the context of Micah 5:2, therefore, “eternity” seems a more reasonable translation for עוֹלָם than “ancient.”

The argument of this footnote derives principally from Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 270, 272; and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1854²), 480-85, 489-91.

⁶⁶¹ Cf., for instance, Hans-Christian Kammler, “Jesus Christus und der Paraklet: Eine Studie zur johanneischen Verhältnisbestimmung von Pneumatologie und Christologie,” in Kammler and Otfried Hofius, *Johannesstudien: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), 87-190 at 117; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: III. Teil: Kommentar zu Kap. 13-21* (HThKNT; Freiburg, 1976), 136; and Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel: Vol. 2* (Francis Noel Davey, ed.; London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 569.

⁶⁶² We owe this argument to George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974: orig., 1889), 111 and 114. Cf. also William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1954), 314; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon St. Jean* (EtB; Paris: Gabalda, 1927), 413; Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887), 170-1.

That the Holy Spirit also derives his personal being from the eternal Logos appears from John 16:12-15 in which Christ says:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears....He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it unto you.

As Bruce Marshall explains, this text implies, according to the consensus of Lutheran scholastics, that the Spirit proceeds not merely from the Father alone, but also from the Son: *a patre filioque*. In his words:

The Spirit, after all, fully shares the one divine essence with the Father and the Son. He is therefore in full possession of the knowledge (that is, the omniscience) which the persons who possess that nature enjoy. What then could the Spirit possibly "take" from the Son, or "hear" from the Son, if he already has the divine essence from the Father alone? He would already have everything the Son could possibly give him, everything which he could receive from the Son, without taking or "hearing" it from the Son at all....If the Spirit takes from the Son at all, as John here says he does, then he can take from him nothing less than the divine essence.⁶⁶³

John 16:12-15, accordingly, seems very much to indicate that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son.

2. *The specifically Trinitarian realities of Scripture.* The Bible testifies clearly, then, to: a) God's absolute simplicity; b) the soundness of the principle of the transitivity of identity; and c) the existence of generation and spiration, the eternal processions by which the Son originates from the Father and the Holy Spirit originates from the Father and the Son. In each of the two eternal processions, moreover, one can discern a principle and a term as well as two opposed relations: that of the *principium* to the *principiatum* and *vice versa*. These are the specifically Trinitarian realities identified by the Bible, i.e. those aspects of God that indubitably pertain to the Trinitarian persons insofar as one can distinguish them from the one, divine essence.

Some subset of these, or perhaps the whole set, it seems, must constitute the basis of real distinction within the eternal Trinity: i.e. that element in virtue of which the

⁶⁶³ "The Defense of the Filioque in Classical Lutheran Theology: An Ecumenical Appreciation," *NZSTh* 44 (2002), 154-73 at 170.

Father is really diverse from the Son, and in virtue of which the Father and Son are really diverse from the Holy Spirit. Since the Bible reveals God's absolute simplicity and the transitivity of identity no less than it reveals the real diversity of the Trinitarian persons, one may reasonably suppose that whatever diversifies the divine persons from one another does so in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity.

3. *The method of the proof.* This necessary compatibility of the doctrine of the Trinity with divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity, moreover, suggests a simple means of discovering, by process of elimination, precisely what renders the Trinitarian persons really distinct from each other. If a real distinction between two Trinitarian realities as such proves incompatible with divine simplicity or the transitivity of identity, then one can say with absolute certainty that these realities do not diversify the Trinitarian persons. Such a verdict, of course, would not imply that the realities in question pertain simply to the common, divine essence. It would mean, rather, that these realities pertain to the Trinitarian persons *qua* distinct only insofar as divine simplicity renders them identical to whatever actually diversifies the persons of the Trinity. One can determine at least which Trinitarian realities do not constitute the Trinitarian persons as distinct, then, simply by determining whether the various conceivable distinctions cohere with the doctrines of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity.

4. *The proof itself.* Divine simplicity, as we have seen, dictates that nothing in God can differ objectively from the divine essence. The law of the transitivity of identity, likewise, dictates that if any two realities are identical to some third reality, they must also be identical to each other *secundum rem*, though not necessarily *secundum rationem*: i.e. in fact though perhaps not in concept. One can reasonably infer from the identity of divine justice and divine love with the divine essence, therefore, that these two realities must be ultimately identical. One would commit the fallacy of equivocation, however, if one argued in *Darapti*:⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶⁴ The validity of syllogisms in *Darapti* has been contested on the grounds that universal propositions lack existential import: i.e. that they abstract from the question of whether the classes to which they refer possess actual members. Hence, the argument goes, one cannot reasonably deduce a

1. Every virtue that is divine justice is divine love;
2. Every virtue that is divine justice is that virtue on account of which God must punish sin; therefore
3. Divine love is that virtue on account of which God must punish sin.

This argument is no sounder than the following, also in *Darapti*:

1. Every star named Hesperus is Phosphorus;
2. Every star named Hesperus is the evening star; therefore
3. Phosphorus is the evening star.⁶⁶⁵

By employing the middle term *secundum rem et non rationem* in the major premise and then *secundum rem et rationem* in the minor premise, the person who argues thus generates a radically false conclusion *secundum rationem*.

The gap between *res* and *ratio*, of course, leads to no real distinction between the divine attributes, because they can exist and function in the absence of a human observer who would perceive them according to differentiated *rationes*. The divine attributes, therefore, can differ only according to rational distinctions, i.e. distinctions

particular, contingent conclusion from universal premises that may refer to "null classes" or "empty sets."

The theses that universal propositions always lack existential import, and that singular propositions always possess existential import, however, seem not to be verified in ordinary discourse. For, *contra* the second thesis, human beings utter singular propositions about, say, Leopold Bloom in full knowledge that, in so doing, they are not predicating extra-mental existence of anything. *Contra* the first thesis, moreover, the Apostle Paul utters the universal proposition, "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10), and thereby expresses a contingent fact without in any way prescinding from the conditions of actual existence.

In any event, those who regard universal propositions as incapable of intimating the existence of particular things may conform our arguments in *Darapti* to their standards by supplying the premise, "the sets referred to in this argument are not empty," in each case. We are indebted for the argument of this footnote to I. M. Bocheński, *A History of Formal Logic* (Ivo Thomas, trans.; New York: Chelsea Press, 1970), 221-4, 365-7 and Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 225-33.

⁶⁶⁵ We owe this example to A. P. Martinich "Identity and Trinity," *JR* 58 (1978), 169-81 at 180.

Martinich himself credits the example to Leonard Linsky, "Hesperus and Phosphorus," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 515-19.

imposed by human beings' limited powers of reasoning. They cannot, however, differ in themselves. The same holds, it seems, for the principles and terms of the divine processions and even the processions themselves insofar as one considers these realities *qua* absolute, sc. in abstraction from the opposed relations. In fact, one could even say, "Phosphorus is the evening star," in a true sense if one intended these terms purely *secundum rem* abstracting from considerations of *ratio*.

The opposed relations to which the intra-Trinitarian processions give rise, however, differ in one all-important respect from the divine attributes and the divine processions, etc. when they are considered in abstraction from the relations. Unlike these other realities, the intra-Trinitarian relations possess *rationes* in themselves regardless of whether human beings contemplate them or not; i.e. they possess *rationes* that are, in a certain respect, *res*. For human reasoning is not required to diversify the divine begetter from the divine begotten; nothing begets itself. The relations of the Son to the Father as his begetter and of the Father to the Son as his only begotten, therefore, exist regardless of whether human beings consider these relations in accordance with imperfect, human concepts.

When one reasons, then, in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son; therefore
3. The divine Father is the divine Son;

one does not, as in the syllogism concerning divine justice and divine love, reach a conclusion that is invalid *secundum rationem*, but valid *secundum rem*. For the *rationes* of the divine relations are *res*. The oppositions of relation implied in the names "Father" and "Son," accordingly, render this syllogism and others like it invalid not only *secundum rationem*, but also *secundum rem*. Unlike the principles and terms of the divine processions and those processions themselves, insofar as these are distinct from the relations of opposition, the intra-Trinitarian relations of opposition do not simply collapse into each other under the collective weight of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity. It seems to follow, then, that

relations of opposition alone can subsist in real distinction from each other without undermining divine simplicity or the transitivity of identity.

5. *Two difficulties.* This conclusion, however, seems liable to two difficulties. It might seem, first, that one who treats the relations of opposition between the persons as *res*, and not merely *rationes*, implicitly denies the doctrine of divine simplicity; and second, that the foregoing argument discredits the law of the transitivity of identity and thus undermines one of its own presuppositions.

a. *Persons, perfections, and simplicity.* The first difficulty arises from the following considerations. The relations' *rationes*, as distinguishing properties of the divine hypostases, cannot constitute perfections of the divine essence; if they did, each divine person would be imperfect insofar as he lacked the personal property of the other two. Yet neither may one correctly regard them as mere aspects under which one considers the one, divine *res* if these *rationes* constitute really distinct *res* of themselves. In order to distinguish these relations' *rationes* from perfections of the divine essence, then, it might seem that one must posit a real distinction between the *res* of the relations and that of the divine essence. If one posited such a distinction, however, one would represent the absolutely simple God of the Bible as a fourfold composite. One might be tempted to conclude, therefore, that one ought to avoid characterizing the intra-Trinitarian relations' *rationes* as really distinct *res* in order to avert this intolerable consequence.

It seems at least negatively demonstrable, nonetheless, that the idea that the divine relations possess, or rather are, really distinct *res*, and not merely *rationes*, does not conflict with the divine simplicity. For, in spite of the "reality" of the relations' *rationes*, one can reasonably differentiate, albeit to a very slight extent, between *res* and *ratio* even in the divine relations. Specifically, one can justly distinguish between the very existence of a divine relation and its reference to another: between, in other words, its *esse in* and its *esse ad*.

The *esse ad* of a divine relation of opposition, i.e. that *ratio* by virtue of which it is a relation, exists, as we have seen, not only in the rational, but also in the real order. It exists in the real order, however, only by virtue of its identity *secundum rem* with the relation's *esse in*. "The *esse in*," as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange phrases it, "is

the title to reality of the *esse ad*.”⁶⁶⁶ For a relation, as a reference of one thing to another, cannot exist in the real order if it inheres in no real subject that admits of being thus referred.

Although each divine relation’s *esse ad* really exists by virtue of its objective identity with the *esse in* of the divine essence, this *esse ad*, considered in abstraction from the divine essence, has no being of itself that could be composed with the *esse in* of the divine substance. The threat that this *esse ad* poses to divine simplicity, therefore, seems nugatory. One cannot undermine the argument above to the effect that only relations of opposition can diversify the divine persons, then, by representing the identity of *ratio* and *res* in these relations as inconsistent with divine simplicity.

b. Presuppositions about identity. One might also object, however, that the outcome of this investigation seems to discredit, at least in a particular case, the principle of the transitivity of identity. If the identity of the Father with God and of the Son with God does *not* entail the identity of the Father and the Son, one might argue, then the principle of the transitivity of identity is not universally applicable. If this were the case, of course, it would be senseless to claim that only those distinctions can exist within the Godhead, which do not violate the law of the transitivity of identity. The method by which we have sought to determine precisely what diversifies the Trinitarian persons, correspondingly, would be highly misleading.

Exegetical and logical considerations, however, seem to falsify the thesis that the arguments against Trinitarian orthodoxy fail because of some exception to the law of the transitivity of identity. For, first, the Bible employs the law of the transitivity of identity in reasoning about God. In Rev 4:11, for instance, one reads, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” One need merely supply the suppressed premise of this enthymeme to translate this argument into the following syllogism in *Darii*.

⁶⁶⁶ *The Trinity and God the Creator: A Commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa, Ia, q. 27-119* (St. Louis and London: Herder, 1952), 118.

1. Every entity that created all things for its own pleasure is worthy of glory, honor, and power;
2. God is an entity that created all things for its own pleasure; therefore
3. God is worthy of glory, honor, and power.

The Bible, therefore, disallows the conclusion that the law of the transitivity of identity simply does not apply *in divinis*.

It seems likely, then, second, that those who argue in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son; therefore
3. The Father is the Son;

reach a false conclusion, not because the law of the transitivity of identity fails to hold, but because they equivocate in their use of the syllogism's middle term, "every entity that is God." When one speaks of God the Father, that is to say, one refers not simply to God, but to God begetting. When one speaks of God the Son, however, one refers, properly speaking, to God begotten. The premises of false syllogism above, consequently, could be written as:

1. Every entity that is God begetting is the divine Father;
2. Every entity that is God begotten is the divine Son.

A middle term, in the proper sense of those words, simply does not exist in a syllogism that identifies the Father with the Son on the basis of their common identity with the divine essence. If one abstracts from the proper *rationes* of the persons so as to render the middle term univocal, however, one renders the argument of such a syllogism innocuous from the points of view of logic and orthodoxy. No orthodox theologian should object, except perhaps on terminological grounds, to the argument in *Darapti*:

1. Every entity that is God is the divine Father abstracting without precision from his fatherhood;
2. Every entity that is God is the divine Son abstracting without precision from his sonship; therefore
3. The divine Father abstracting without precision from his fatherhood is the divine Son abstracting without precision from His sonship.

In other words, the divine essence is the divine essence.

6. *Conclusion.* It seems, then, that one can establish, without appealing to extra-Scriptural premises, that relative opposition alone diversifies the divine persons each of whom is identical with the one, absolutely simple Godhead. In other words, "In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes."⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁷ DH 1330.

V. Implications

From this justly acclaimed axiom follow a number of consequences of inestimable importance for the theology of the Trinity. As we explained in Chapter 3, the dictum “In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes,” implies a) that the divine persons possess, as peculiar to themselves, only their reference to each other and the properties that follow immediately therefrom; b) that they, accordingly, can act only through God’s essential omnipotence which is equally identical with each of the three; c) that all divine acts *ad extra* may, in consequence, be ascribed with equal right to any of the divine persons; and d) finally, that one may not, therefore, legitimately infer the tripersonality of God from divine effects that may appear to manifest the activity of three divine agencies. This implies, of course, that human beings, at least before they enjoy the beatific vision, can possess warranted true belief in the doctrine of the Trinity only if God communicates this doctrine to human beings through concepts and/or words.

In the preceding sections of this chapter, therefore, we have established: a) that Phil 2:6-7 ascribes two distinct natures to Christ so that one can give due credit to the Scriptural evidence for his deity without implicitly denying its affirmations of his full humanity; b) that the Holy Spirit constitutes a divine person in his own right, distinct from the Father and the Son; c) that “in God all things are one where no opposition of relation intervenes;” d) that the divine persons cannot manifest their distinctness to human beings who do not enjoy the beatific vision without resorting to verbal, or at least conceptual, forms of communication; and e) that the doctrine of the Trinity, at least in its orthodox, Latin form, consequently, presupposes the doctrine of the verbal/conceptual inspiration of Scripture.

Epilogue

We began this work with a massive critique of Rahner's contention that human beings come to learn of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of inferences from their experience of divine self-communication as mediated by the events of salvation history and objectified in Scripture. We sought to prove, in this first half, specifically: a) that a simultaneously simple and mutable God cannot correspond precisely to his former self in any respect after undergoing the alterations Rahner considers requisite to divine self-communication; b) that, even if such a God could exempt the intra-Trinitarian relations from this sort of metamorphosis, human beings would possess no means of knowing that he has actually done so if he does not, through some verbal/conceptual revelation, inform them of this; c) that Rahner's own insistence on the exclusively relative character of the intra-Trinitarian distinctions precludes the possibility of God's revealing the doctrine of the Trinity through means other than the beatific vision or verbal/conceptual revelation; and d) that one can reconcile the Biblical accounts of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit, when interpreted in accordance with the *Grundaxiom*, with Rahner's Latin Trinitarianism only by so modifying one's understanding of the *Grundaxiom* itself as to render it powerless to warrant inferences from the economy of salvation to the doctrine of the Trinity. In Part 1, then, we supplied what we regard as conclusive evidence for each of these four charges: any one of which, if substantiated, would suffice to render Rahner's understanding of the means whereby God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity incredible.

In Part 2, we attempted to complement the criticisms of Part 1 with some constructive alternative. Specifically, we sought to demonstrate that the sixty-six books of the Protestant, Scriptural canon, whose inerrancy, perspicuity, and sufficiency we presupposed, actually contain, at least implicitly, the doctrine of the Trinity in its orthodox, Latin form. We sought, accordingly: first, to establish the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ on the basis of Phil 2:6-7; second, to vindicate the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit; third, to vindicate the doctrines of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity; fourth, to establish the existence of the specifically Trinitarian realities of Scripture, sc. the divine processions, their principle and terms, and the relations between them; and, fifth, to ascertain precisely

what diversifies the Trinitarian persons by determining which of these Trinitarian realities may subsist as distinct in the divine essence without undermining the principles of divine simplicity and the transitivity of identity. In accomplishing this fifth task, we established that one can derive from Scriptural premises alone that capstone of Latin, Trinitarian doctrine, the axiom, "In God all things are one, where no opposition of relation intervenes." We saw that this axiom, moreover, implies that the divine persons, by virtue of their ontological constitution, can exert no distinct influences on creation. By sharing every aspect of the divine life in common with the exception of their opposed relations, that is to say, the divine persons forfeit the prerogative to act independently and so consent to influence creation only through the one, absolutely undifferentiated divine omnipotence.

On account of this ultimate consequence of our argument in Part 2, one could justifiably deem this work's second half an elaborate *apologia* for a fifth criticism of Rahner's understanding of the process whereby God reveals the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings: viz. that if the Trinitarian persons can exert no personally differentiated influences on the world, then one cannot possibly learn of the doctrine of the Trinity merely by reflecting on the economy of salvation as objectified in salvation history or in one's private religious experience. In this case, it seems, one could reasonably argue in *modus tollendo ponens*:

1. The divine persons can reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision, if they can reveal it to such human beings at all, in one of only two ways: by communicating this doctrine in verbal/conceptual form or by exerting personally differentiated influences on creation from which the persons' diversity could be inferred;
2. The divine persons, however, cannot exercise personally differentiated influences on creation; therefore
3. If the divine persons can reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to human beings who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision at all, they can reveal it only through a verbal/conceptual revelation.

One cannot, therefore, reasonably believe the doctrine of the Trinity unless one also believes that God has revealed this doctrine through concepts and/or words.

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